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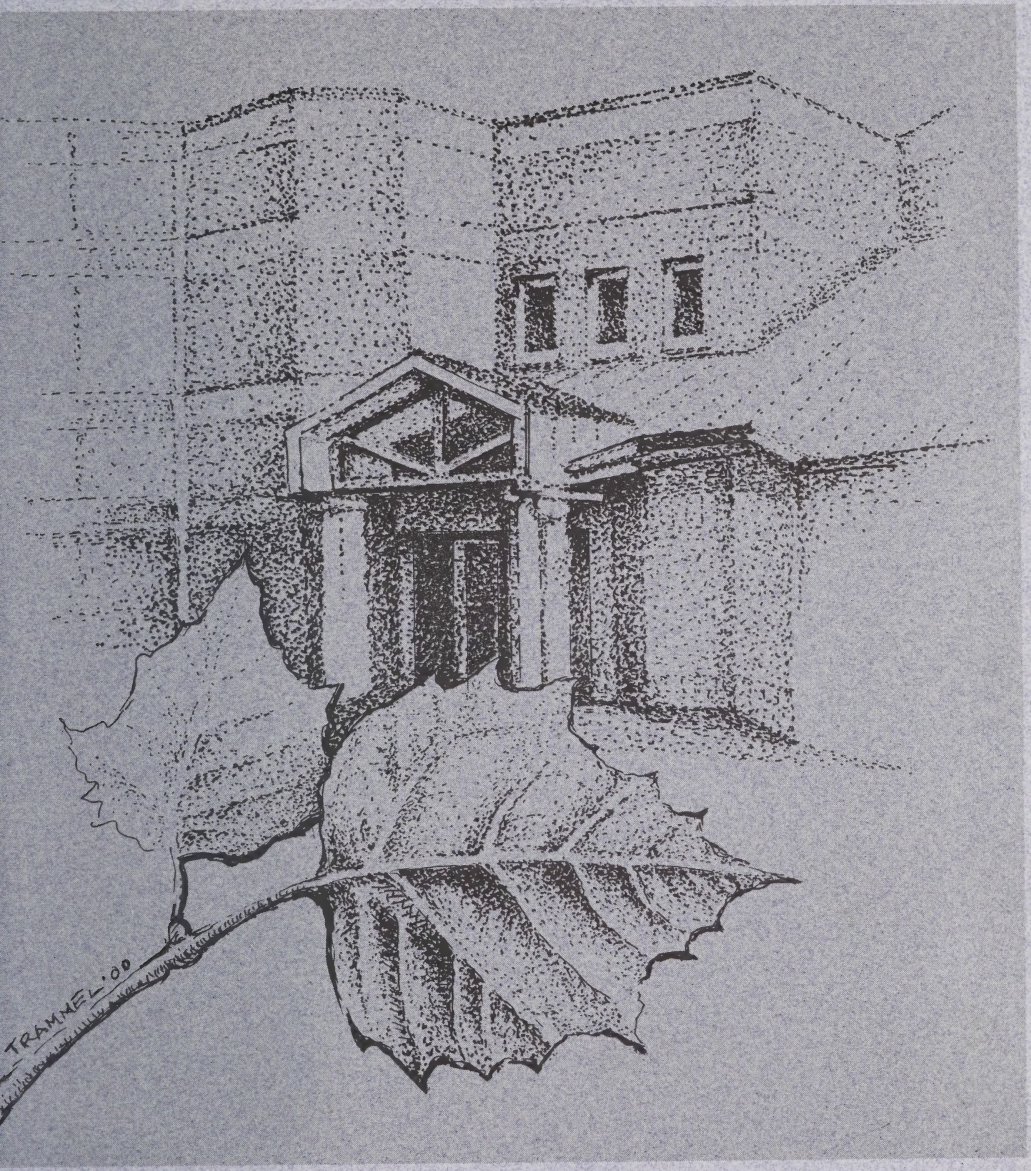

VICTORIA PRESS
2000

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

Victoria Press

Sixth Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2000

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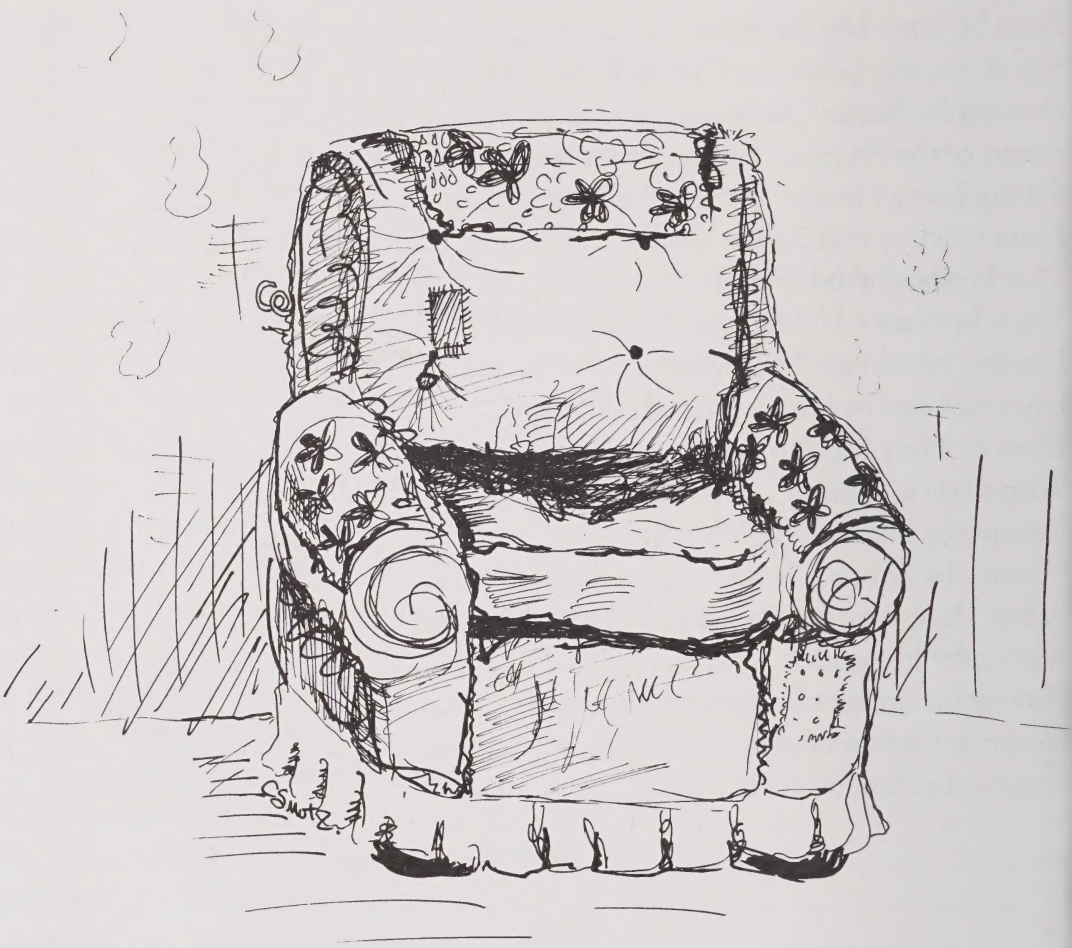
Cover drawing of Sycamore Building by Sharon Trammel



Drawing by Constance M. Smutz

Morris

Fred Chappell

The chair she sat in with an earnest groan
Was lumpy, frumpy, boggy, saggy, butt
Sprung and dingy, weary to the bone
And older than the pleasures of King Tut.

Where it came from no one now recalled;
It was so long a part of Family
Nobody noticed how it had grown bald
And spavined, unsteady as Uncle McGhee.

Aunt Edna would sit there like she owned the place,
And yet she seemed a property of the chair,
As beauty is a property of grace,
Right angles the properties of a square.

Now Aunt Edna's gone. The chair remains,
With drowsy Audrey nestled in its warm
Complacent cushions with their ancient stains
And mends and redolent maternal charm.

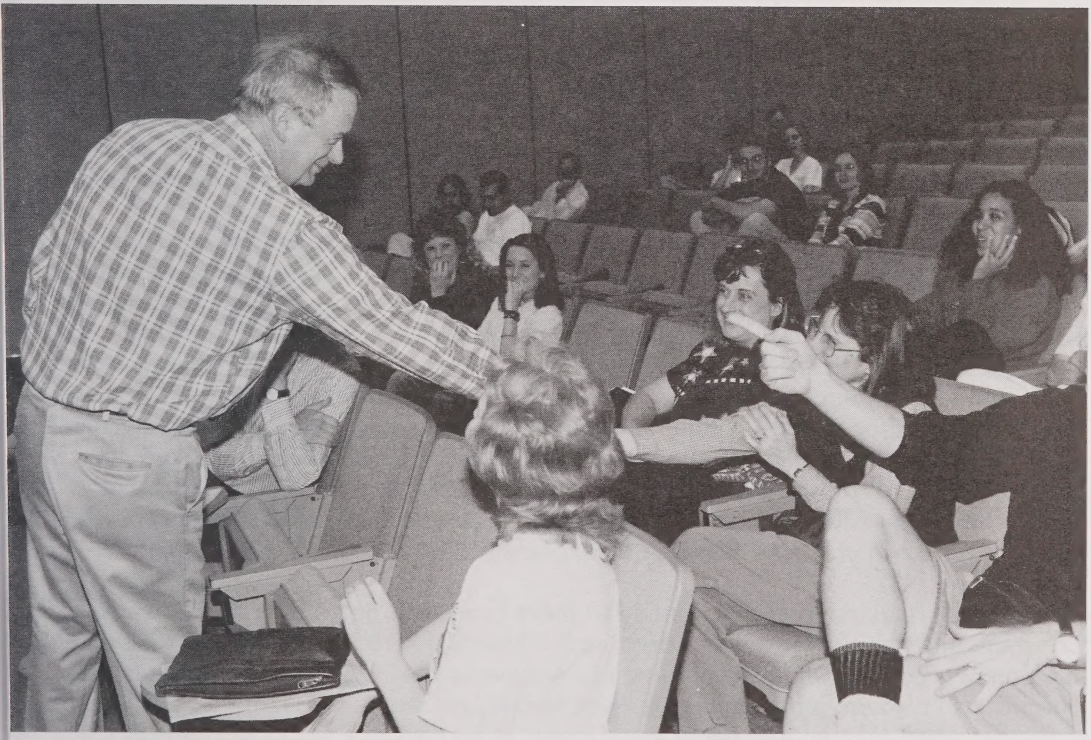
It comforts her as it has comforted
Two generations of kin and eight of cats.
No longer proud, its noblest glories fled,
It humbly supports purses, bottoms, hats.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Secretless

Fred Chappell

Cousin Vance you know instinctively
Has no secrets. Open as a plain
In Kansas, guileless as a terrapin,
Straightforward, candid to the nth degree.
He tells you anything you like, and more.
What else could make him such a thumping bore?



Fred Chappell, North Carolina's poet laureate, brightens our campus with his visit.

Photo by Lee Schleining

Backsliding

Celia H. Miles

Backsliding was a way of life for Les Bob Sutton. Some folks who didn't get the kind of attention he did at every revival said he kept the preachers in business. If Les had not backslid enough to get re-converted, well, it had not been a very exciting year.

Les staggered down the aisle. He wasn't drunk, not on revival days, just loose-jointed, always just about ready to fly into pieces. All his appendages flopped and ambled. It was a miracle he got down to the altar without following his wandering arms and knees in the direction of first one side of the church, then the other.

He made it and fell to his knees before Preacher Duffey. On either side were four other sinners who had responded to the call. They were new to the conversion experience. Not so Les. He was a regular. Every revival meeting. And for good reason. His exploits kept the community entertained. Not that he was really bad, but he did tend to get caught. But he liked the food at the jail. He could count on Mrs. Orton fixing him cobbler every time. That's because he was so charming. He could charm the birds right off their nests, women said.

"Lord, I have sinned and come up short. I aim to do right. I've give my life to you, Lord, before and I'm here again. A sinner. Lord, forgive me." His head was bowed, his hands clasped in prayer.

Preacher Duffey put both hands on Les's shoulders. His voice was lower and I couldn't hear all he said, but I'd heard it before when I was sitting closer to the front of the church. It always went something like this: "Brother, are you truly repentant? Are you giving your self, your soul and yourself to God? Are you ready to accept him as your savior? Pray about it, brother. This is not a decision to make lightly nor to scoff at. Are you willing to change your ways, ready to accept the Lord's burden? Can you give up the ways of the world and dedicate your life to him, to the Lord who died on the cross for you, brother, for the sweet Jesus who died on the cross for all of us sinners in this room? The sinners here at the altar and the sinners on the benches. We're all sinners and we need the grace of the Lord."

Tears rolled down Les's face, stalling in the full mustache he wore, and then sliding into the corners of his mouth. His loose body was steady as if it were held in place with bailing wire. Then he shook all over. He lowered his head even further, his forehead touching the floor where Preacher Duffey stood, one step higher than the converts. He nodded, almost banging his head on the floor. "I'm ready, Preacher. I hear what you're saying. I know I'm a sinner and I know there's grace abounding for all who love the Lord."

Preacher Duffey asked the others at the front to kneel while he led us all in prayer and he asked the congregation to get off the benches and onto their knees before the Lord, too. Many persons had already moved to the aisle to kneel; others slipped down in front of the pews. Some of us just sat with heads down and eyes mostly closed. I'd seen Les's rededication a couple of times before. I hope Preacher Duffey believed him—and, the Lord, of course. I know I did.

After the final hymn people went up to shake hands with the new and rededicated Christians and to welcome them to the church's bosom. There were smiles and tears and hugs and generally good feelings. A baptizing in a few weeks would make their commitments definite. As I filed up, gently guided by Aunt Mattie, and shook Les's hand, I was trying to remember where I'd seen him last. It came to me: at his baptizing last year. After the dipping in the Tuckaseegee River we'd all gone up to Deacon Carson's house so the baptized could dry off and change clothes and have fellowship and eat cake and drink coffee. I went around the corner of the house to see the new litter of kittens. Les was dripping wet and he had his hand on Evelyn Jones' equally dripping wet breast.

Auction

Rita Speltz

Earth-bound bodies,
filled with the land's bounty,
scratch the ground for more.

Leather smiles break through the rural crowd
while hands dig in boxes
stuffed with memories,
attached to their own,
falling away.

And the bidders push for the neighbor's junk.

Beauty dried up with each summer's labor:
weathered skin bears the burden,
for they carry the yoke
as did the oxen before them.

Today their rough hands reach out and laugh.

The farmer's wife,
his partner in tilling the soil,
stands alone,
fence-leaning,
greeting each neighbor
waiting to carry off
her years of country living.

I touch her agony
but stand apart,
as she stares at the grass,
not to be sold
today.

A Cat Tale

Sue Wright Barron

Back in high school when the annual science fair came around, my boyfriend Nelson (who was of a scientific nature) and I decided to do a team project. We knew we could not make another ecosystem in a pie pan. We had kind of outgrown that, so we decided to do our project on embalming. We made a little graph to show where we were at the beginning and where we needed to be when the project was complete and realized that the first thing we needed was something to embalm. It had to be relatively small, but large enough to be impressive. We talked to our Sunday School teacher who taught science at a rival high school, and she recommended a cat. She even had a cat that she would donate to our project. We were on the right track. We just knew it.

The second thing we needed was to know how to embalm. We talked to the director at the funeral home we passed every day on our way home from school. He solemnly told us he would like to work with us on the project. He suggested that we schedule time to actually work at the funeral home a few evenings to read some of his technical books as well as some texts on the history of embalming. Hey, we were impressed and excited! We were planning to get married as soon as we graduated, and we had begun to think that maybe being funeral directors was our life calling.

We put in our time at the funeral home, and, when the director decided we were ready, he told us to get our "body" and bring it in and he would help us complete the project. We set the time for the following Sunday afternoon. Miss Jackson brought us the cat in a grocery box to Sunday School. We took him on around to my house and locked him in the garage. After lunch we had to figure out a way to kill the cat.

Nelson went into the garage armed with a lead pipe intending to ever so gently bash the cat on the back of the head, thus doing him in; then we would take him to the funeral home to "prepare the body." My mother was designing and sewing the coffin and bedding. All was set. Now this is where your previous knowledge of cats comes in. There does not exist a cat who is going to let a person holding a lead pipe aloft come near him. Think about it!

After two hours of being locked up in a sweltering garage chasing and trying to kill a smart tom cat, Nelson emerged totally defeated. He sat down beside me on the back steps and asked, "What are we going to do now?" We were supposed to be in the embalming room at that very moment completing our project. Obviously, we were not ready. We walked down the railroad tracks to Nelson's house to see if his parents had any suggestions. They were not home. We sank down into the couch in his living room feeling crushed. About that time we saw a gray squirrel running up a little oak tree in Nelson's front yard. He ran and got his rifle. He popped the squirrel just right. We headed for the funeral home with our precious body.

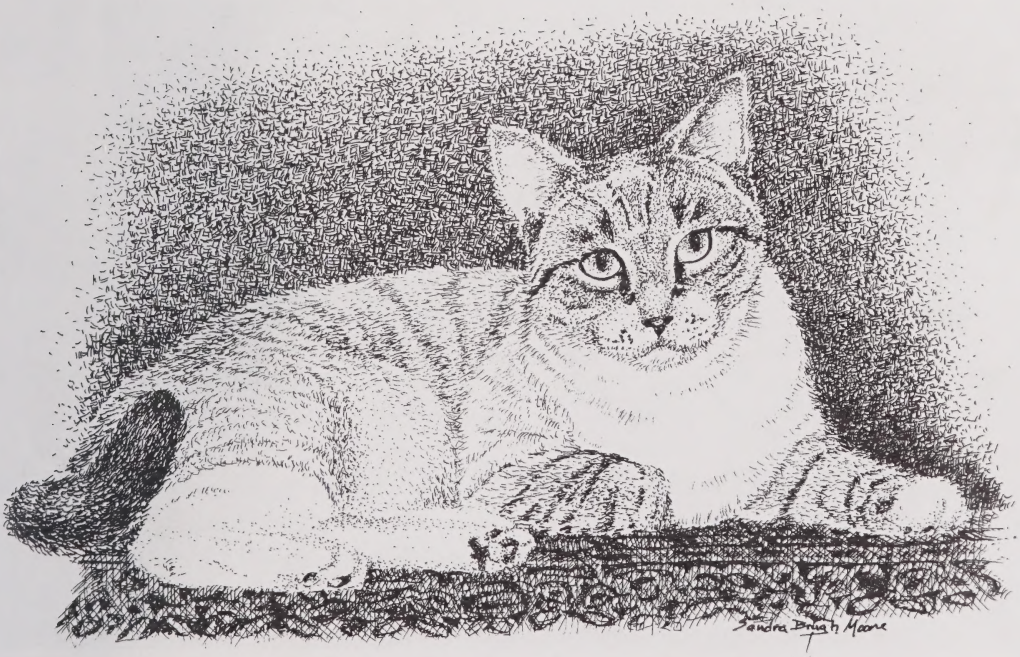
When we and the funeral director finished with the scientific part, I went and got the "casket" my mother had completely lined with white satin. It even had a little white satin pillow on which to lay the furry little head. Our project was beautiful. He looked so natural. So peaceful. He even had a smile on his face. Boy, were we proud and relieved!

On Monday when we went to school we had three posters telling the history of

embalming, the various techniques of embalming, and how we actually did the embalming. We had an eight-page research paper written with the most impressive bibliography we had ever seen. But the most important thing we had was our squirrel in his own handmade casket.

History teachers invited us into their classes to share what we had learned about how various cultures had preserved bodies down through the ages; our English teachers asked us to show our paper and tell how we had gathered such marvelous information (there was no encyclopedia entry) and give an oral report on what we had learned; but best of all Ms. Pappy and Mr. Walters were really impressed, and we both made "A++" on our project and paper. We did all right at the science fair. We were not asked to take our project to the regions or anything like that, but we were quite popular among our peers at Andrew Jackson High School, and that was good enough for us.

There is no way to let that be "The End" because remember the title is "A Cat Tale" and you do not know what happened to the cat. That big yellow cat made the best pet my mother and I ever had. We named him Tom. He lived eleven years after the garage incident, and he never held a grudge against me or Nelson. He did sort of smile whenever we got near him, though. There is nothing as smug as a cat who beats a human in a death match.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

The Clothesline

Dara Llewellyn

Defined by my laundry chores, I wonder:
How many loads can I fit in this weekend?
Sheets, towels, colors, whites, piled on the floor
Waiting to be washed, dried, folded, and put away.

Carrying a load of sheets out to the clothesline,
I step carefully over chestnut burrs,
Pin the sheets to the line; watch the graceful flap in the wind,
Sharp flags of color against the green hemlocks.

When I stand at the clothesline, pinning exact corners,
I feel part of the ancient, feminine tradition,
Part of those who have always done the washing,
Stretching back in an unending line.

I remember the clotheslines of my childhood,
The pleasure I took when I could reach that high,
The importance I felt hanging out towels,
My own family chore.

Now, occasionally, I wish for a dryer,
To shorten the length of my tasks.
Yet, pinning each cloth to the clothesline
Feels like another bead on a rosary.

In this ritual I learned from my mother
I use the pins that she used.
She kept hers in a cloth bag.
I leave my pins on the line now.

Occasionally, I buy new pins
Replacing the broken springs in my stock.
I marvel that the store still sells them,
Such simple tools—combined with a clothesline.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Dream, Home, Love

Mollie Rubin (Rose)

Dream. Home. Love.
Child. Work. Walks. Sun.
Garden. Rocks. Water. Quiet.
Quiet. Walks. Water. Sun.
Dream. Home. Love.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Goldwingers Going Somewhere

Celia H. Miles

Today I was shot through with a dart that entered as envy and emerged as wistfulness. It was a calm enough time. My husband and I were driving on I-40 in a damp drizzle that wasn't yet a hard rain. The car was warm. We were companionably quiet. I was working a crossword puzzle and had just learned a new word. My world was as serene and placid as a flat pancake—only I didn't realize it until we passed a convoy of Goldwings. Six of them traveling together. Each big machine held two persons—a man and a woman—and as we passed, I could look closely at each couple. These weren't Hell's Angels or teenagers or leather-clad, tattooed types. These were my types! At least in some ways chronological and physical. I saw plump grandmotherly cheeks, gray hair, glasses, solid and stout stomachs, some (surely) false teeth, some gray eyebrows.

They all had their rainsuits on, which may have added to their "filled out" quality, but clearly they weren't lean and mean boys and girls. One couple had on burgundy suits that matched exactly their Goldwing; and, of course, their helmets, glistening, polished, shedding raindrops, matched. They were talking into their microphones, oblivious to the murky day. The others wore bright yellow or orange suits, colors mostly matching their bikes. It couldn't have taken us more than a minute or so to pass them by, but they stayed with me. They all sat proudly, straight, comfortably. Not one looked irritated or disgusted with the weather. Well, I wasn't disgusted either. I like rain, but I was protected, ensconced in my steel and plastic buggy.

I didn't feel the rain on my face, the wind, didn't hear the sizzle as tires cut through the slick pavement.

Now common sense tells me that all six of those couples are not perfectly matched, perfectly happy, perfectly content, but my gut tells me something else. They seemed at one with each other, at one with the big bike, at ease with the world, rain be damned, we're enjoying ourselves! I suddenly felt older than my years, older than the bikers, older than the wet asphalt! I was returning to a cozy house, a quiet day—but the Goldwingers were going adventuring, slipping through the elements in style, not ignoring the rain and not protected entirely, meeting it and glorying in it. So what if I was safe and secure, happy, a whole day at my disposal. At that moment what I really wanted—really wanted—was to be on one of those Goldwings headed somewhere.

Harbinger

Nancy Dillingham

Late October
breeds bright bird leaves
flying outside my window

harvest's harbingers heaping
their heaviness upon me
with intimations of snow and sleep

Chronologically at least
it is not yet my autumn
still I feel compelled to rise
and wonder at their quick demise

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Her Sister's Shoes

Julia Nunnally Duncan

As I cleaned my mother's closet
to help her discard the worn,
make room for the new,
I tossed aside her shoes,
outdated pumps and slick-bottomed sandals,
while she busied herself in dresser drawers.
I opened a box and discovered
a pair of oxfords,
most discardable of all,
I thought:
short, plain, gray—
I cast them aside
maybe with a laugh, some remark.
Suddenly,
she snatched them
and held them to her;
"They're Ruby's shoes!" she cried
and told me
they were all she had of her sister
who died many years ago.

I remembered:
my kind, portly, gruff-speaking aunt,
a cigarette dangling from her mouth,
ashes always dangerously hanging—
a sort of Shelley Winters
who loved me like a daughter
she never had.
Fourteen I was when she passed—
she only a few years older
than I am now.
Yes, those shoes I recall:
work shoes for the textile mill;
ugly, functional,
yet they defined the simple nature
of the homely woman,
once a hazel-eyed beauty
much pursued in her time.

God, why do some people die so young?
Why do their hearts give way?
we'd asked then,
no comfort offered by preacher or kin.
All this I recall—
passing by her casket in the Victorian parlor
of our town funeral home;
standing in line amidst the suffocating perfume
of rose-encircled wreaths,
hearing my mother in front of me
wailing—
as she had wailed from her bedroom
the nights before.
From down the hall
I heard my father trying to comfort her—
Don't cry, don't cry—
in a tender voice
reserved mostly for his children.
I pressed my palms hard over my ears,
put my head under the covers
to shut out the horror.

All this—all this—
brought back by two mute shoes
best left alone
in my mother's closet.

Holocaust Museum

Rita Speltz

What I saw in those monumental halls
tortured my eyes to their bloodshot core.
If I could not have *seen* a thing
my ears would have suffered me
the agony of victims:
mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandfathers, grandmothers . . .

The questions rise up again,
in the air-conditioned comfort,
for strolling tourists.
Replicas on every floor,
exhibits of before and after,
cobblestones, walking bridges
built to segregate,
camp wooden-planked beds,
one on top of another, on top of another . . .
Shoes, piles of reeking old leather,
suitcases, cooking utensils, combs, prayer shawls,
old photographs of intense moments:
incredibly gorgeous faces,
plastering walls many feet high.

Images pound my entire body,
weakening me in the knees.
Continuously,
I shake my head,
incredulous,
to the ends of my fingers.

A baby,
when monsters ruled
in another part of this world,
I was not ripped
from my mother's arms,
but the questions
leave me
feeling
dead.

"And Jesus wept."

The statue of Jesus stands in foreground of Oklahoma City Memorial.

Surrounding the statue are columns—one for each of the victims of the bombing.
At back left is an untouched, rather new building.
In middle is the crane—reminding us of the destruction of the bombing
and the rebuilding of the memorial to those who died there.
At back right is the fence with memorabilia and messages
to the victims and their families and friends.

Photo by Beth Richardson Mitchell

Mardi Gras Haiku

Becki Janes

Go to New Orleans
Jambalaya in your heart
Voodoo me your soul

A Hole in One

Gerald Metz

Gray accent on pink!
Yang enveloped by yin!
Cold surrounded by warm!
Thick thrusting through thin!
The passive punctuates the lively, and
plainness perforates the lovely.
The uninhabited decorates the uninhibited as
Stark stainless steel springs unexpectedly
from secret places.

Hunting

Parker Lewis

My grandfather taught me more to fear a gun than to respect it. We were squirrel hunting in swampland stretching along the Altamaha River in southeastern Georgia in winter. The land is flood plain, supporting massive cypress, gum, pine and water oak. In winter these trees anchor the land in place, holding it against the rising waters of the river, keeping its topsoil out of the estuaries of the Atlantic, a mere sixty miles downriver.

As a boy I didn't know the monetary value or the function of the trees on this land, nor, I suppose, did I care too much. The place, to me, was magical. The trees were the biggest things I'd ever seen in my life, with canopies I could barely see, and they supported birds, snakes, chattering squirrels. Otter and beaver, perch, smallmouth bass and catfish swam in the coffee-colored water of the small ponds within the swamp. Cypress trees had knees, water oaks dropped acorns the size of golf balls, and I had seen alligators sunning themselves on the banks of the very pond on which I was floating.

To get there, Papa and I drove a battered Jeep an hour through sandy farms and smoldering clearings in the pine forests. He waved to farmers on their tractors or housewives in their yards, yet he would shake his head in silent reproach at the junk in the poor people's yards. We spoke little. Papa would point to a deer crossing a field if he saw one or the dark tip of a black snake as it disappeared into the roadside grass, but mostly he drove and I would sit and look out the window, amazed, sometimes depressed, by the endless rows of pine trees, the flat sandy soil, the black water sitting stagnant in roadside ditches.

At the entrance to the swamp was a locked gate. It was my job to open the gate and hold it open while Papa drove through. I then had to thread the heavy, rusty chain through the links of the gate and lock it behind us. It was my responsibility. I liked to imagine we were entering the forest of no return as we crept down a steep hill into the swamp.

Once parked, Papa would meticulously show me how to load my gun, how to carry it safely, how to check the safety, how to put in my earplugs. He would put a green cap over my blinding white hair, cover his own with a brown one, and we would set off in a direction Papa knew but I did not, and did not question.

Papa walked slowly, ponderously, stopping often to kneel close to the ground or look high up in the gray branches. He was aware of much that I was not. I wondered how long it would be before I got to shoot my gun, wondered how long before it would be okay for me to ask for something to eat. Hunting to me was a dark and mysterious thing, done only with men who expected children to put aside their childish ways if they were to come along.

Hunting to me, in the few times I had been before this trip, always meant being roused terribly early on cold mornings, long before the sun, fried-egg sandwiches, bitter coffee, my father and uncle unwashed and unshaven. I knew enough as a boy to know that hunting was something I was supposed to like, supposed to want to do. Riding crunched up in the cab of a truck, watching the sky turn a delicate blue, listening to the

men talk, I always felt excitement, but it was always mixed with a twinge of ominous worry.

My uncle had, at one time, held the title of World Champion Skeet Shooter. He won this title after shooting a competition while on crutches. The sign that announced your arrival in Baxely, Georgia, my father's hometown, also announced that this was the home of Bobby Lewis, "World Skeet Shooting Champion." I had, on those cold early mornings, terribly large shoes to fill.

I had seen boys, some younger than myself, local boys from this part of the world, who swaggered and spat, cussed and had no fear of the guns they were carrying. They looked like they were born in camouflage clothing. Their fathers and older brothers, uncles and cousins all had an easy singsong speech, and a careless way with guns. I knew with dismay, that I was not like them.

On this particular day, after we had been walking awhile, Papa stopped me and pointed to a spot on the ground. I saw turned-up leaves, exposed forest dirt, broken acorns. Papa saw a banquet table where many wild turkeys had recently feasted. Although we were not turkey hunting, Papa pulled a small wooden object out of his pocket and, using a similar looking stick, made strange clucking noises by drawing the stick along the underside of the object. He then cocked his ear for what would seem to me to be entirely too long, listening for something I knew I could never hear—the wind for all I knew—before putting these things back in his pocket and slowly walking off.

We continued this devilishly slow pace until we arrived somehow on the top of a small ridge. Here Papa finally rested, setting his gun against a tree and sitting in the dried leaves. I dropped down next to him wondering if I could finally ask about the candy bars we had brought with us. He produced them from his jacket pocket, along with some pecans and fruitcake wrapped in foil. I ate a candy bar; he, bites of fruitcake.

I could not contain my anticipation and boyish excitement. My feet spilled dry leaves as I shuffled my legs and fidgeted. Papa's look was enough to calm me down. He pointed down the ridge to a flat area of the forest. I followed his finger down until I found a raccoon. He was sitting on his hind legs, casually licking first one paw then the other as though they were covered with jam. Papa indicated my gun with his eyes and my heart raced. In my haste I knocked the gun to the ground from its leaning perch against a tree, but the raccoon was too far away to be startled by the sound.

I shouldered the gun just like he had shown me, slowly, closing my right eye when the stock reached my cheek. I could hear my own heart beating, and my breath was coming in short gasps. I found the raccoon at the end of the gun barrel, still sitting and licking his paws, and I sighted the barrel's bead at the animal.

"Squeeze the trigger. Don't pull it. Keep your eyes open," I told myself. I held the barrel on the animal for a long time. He slowly shifted forward onto all fours and walked off. I continued holding the gun on the spot where the raccoon had just been. My cheek began to burn. I set the gun down slowly against a tree. I was both ashamed and relieved. While aiming my gun at the creature, I remembered reading that raccoons can pick up food with their front paws and eat it much like we do and that they prefer to sit by water so they can dip their food in as they eat.

I was afraid to look to Papa. When I finally did, he seemed to have a joyless smile. I don't think he wanted me necessarily to shoot the raccoon, but I think perhaps he

wanted to know that I was capable of shooting a raccoon.

We had come here on this day to hunt squirrels, but a winter wind high in the trees had kept the squirrels out of sight. We descended the ridge in the general direction the raccoon had walked; perhaps it was the way we had come, but I had no idea. Our pace was quicker and I imagined Papa's being disgusted with my failure. He stopped and looked around less frequently.

I noticed that he had stopped and was pointing toward the canopy of a tree. Again I looked in the direction his finger was indicating and saw a mass of twigs and leaves: a squirrel's nest. Papa handed me his gun, an ancient shotgun that until now was not for me to shoot. I set my gun aside and took up his. Its barrel was scratched and its wooden stock worn smooth by years of fingers. It was heavy and scary. I raised the gun to my shoulder, too scared to remind myself of the procedures, released the safety and saw Papa out of the corner of my eye. He had turned away and stuck his two middle fingers into his ears. I fired blindly upward, closing my eyes long before my finger ever tightened over the trigger.

Instantly my jaw stung, my shoulder ached, my eyes watered, and my ears rang numbly. I looked down and saw a thin curl of smoke coming out of the discharged shell. My mouth tasted like gunpowder. I looked up and saw the same tangled mass of twigs and leaves, exactly as it had been before I fired.

I gave the gun back to Papa. We walked silently back to the Jeep, my ears ringing, feeling as though they could be bleeding. At the top of the hill, on the outside of the swamp, Papa talked to a man in coveralls with pink skin splotched with brown, a hog farmer he once told me with a noticeable degree of respect. They talked about the rain, and they talked about the mild winter and what would soon be, in this warm climate, an early spring planting. I stood under Papa's hand, politely nodding to the man when he indicated he was talking to me, all the while imagining tiny baby squirrels being ripped apart while sleeping, their mother returning, her cheeks packed with acorns, to find an empty nest.

There is a photograph somewhere in a shoebox. In it my father and uncle stand with a pale winter sun behind them. Their hunting caps are askew on their heads, and their insulated shirt sleeves are pushed above their elbows. Their hands are darkened with dried blood. They hold between their opposing arms a rope upon which a dozen or so squirrels hang by their tied front legs. They are young looking, much younger than I ever remember them looking, and they are smiling proudly.

Photo by Mary McClurkin

J.C. Feeds His Cats

Will Hooper

J.C. feeds his cats at noon—
dog-eared and quick
with kinks in their tails—
Strays, they just show up.
He feeds them and they stay—
A mountain pile of gravy, biscuits, beans and bacon.
They feed on top of the old green well house
next to the porch in the shade.

Hazel used to feed J.C.
Now her swollen toes won't let her—
J.C. feeds her nowadays.
Sausage, ham and grits, gravy, jelly and biscuits.
On Sundays their nine kids with their kids
come and bring food for everybody—
and them kids run and play like their parents
did in J.C. & Hazel's yard.
They run and chase and fight and hide and seek
and they break up into favorite groups—
some go fishing,
some play ball in the field,
some walk in the tall grass by the river,
some watch the game on tv
and talk to Hazel in her bed and J.C.
at the table next to his Crisco spittoon

and they smile and say "Daddy, when'd you start likin' cats?"
and he says "I don't!"
and they say "Well why you feedin' 'em then?"
and he says "Hell, somebody's got to!" and he grins and he spits.
and they laugh and know not to mess with Daddy's cats.

In the evening J.C. sits by Hazel's bed
and holds her swollen knuckle hands and kisses her cheek
when his swollen heart lets him as a patch of light sneaks
through the dusty curtained window and it looks like
a patch of butter on the wall to him.
And they remember when her feet and his heart let them
picnic by the river at midnight—fried chicken, beans and biscuits—
and they watched the water bubble and glisten and dip and swirl
'neath a stonewhite moon.

John Calvin feeds his cats at noon.

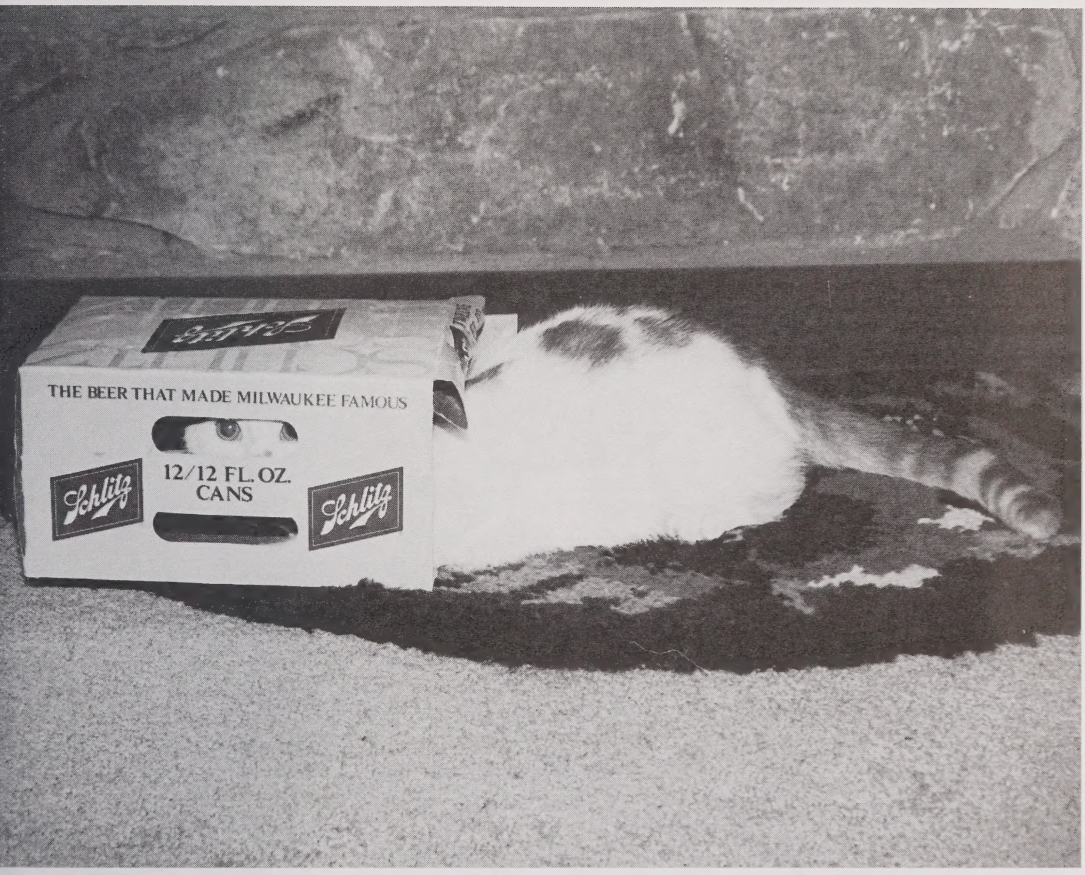


Photo by Mary McClurkin

The Angel with Black Wings

Sue Wright Barron

We waited dreadfully for months and years to meet you face to face.
What would it mean to actually have you at our place?
All day long our anticipation was steady,
But when you arrived I was not ready.
The bread was not laid;
The tea was not made.
We were sore afraid.
You came anyway
To rob and slay.
Go away!
Away!

Photo by Celia H. Miles

Joyce

Celia H. Miles

I didn't want to think
the sweet potato tasted sweet
the butter teased my tongue
and the cornbread, light inside,
was crisp and browned just right.

A bad accident, life-flighted to surgery, they said,
to relieve the swelling, to ease the blood clot in the brain,
A drug-induced coma to sedate the patient, a family in a sedated
state in the hospital halls, at the coffee machine, at the pay phone
and in the quiet chapel with its dark green cushioned pews and
cool brass cross, low lights, its calligraphy scripture on the walls.

We didn't want to eat, four hundred miles from the family, four hundred
and fifty-eight miles from the skid marks and the battered railing and the
milepost marker
forever engraved in her mother's, and daddy's, and brother's minds. But we did
and wondered
that our throats didn't choke, our hearts didn't shatter, our chests, though filled
with sighs, kept breathing; we washed the dishes, wandered through the house,
returned to the e-mail:

Joyce passed away at 8:45; arrangements incomplete at this time.

Arrangements would never
be complete again.

Long-Haired Boy

Julia Nunnally Duncan

Today I think of you
my savior,
my blond friend and lover,
whose image was created
in my lonely girlhood mind.

Through the years my heart
has been tossed and tumbled.
I have wanted to die
and longed to live;
I have regressed into past lives
I'd hoped to have experienced,
but arrived back here
in my small-town Southern life.
I've hardly thought of you
until now,
and today
the sharp breeze of mid-September
that stirs my windchimes
and waits for woodsmoke
to lift into October skies
reminds me of you.
Of you, I think
and wonder
and look at pastures I pass
and recall how I waited for you
to rise from the crest of a hill
to walk down to me.
I still look.
I still wait.

Once I watched for you
on the festive streets of Asheville,
thought I passed you at Christmastime.
Is it you? I asked
when a young man passed
in turtleneck and bellbottoms,
whose hair hung on his shoulders,
who hummed "Kicks."
Where are you,
oh long-haired boys of my girlhood?
Where are you,
my own long-haired boy?
Is your hair now gray;
is your brow now furrowed?
I don't care—
I still look.
I still wait.

Lilac Buds

Randee Brenner Goodstadt

Heavy frost, late October
And I am surveying the damage.
Blackened dahlias, zinnias and blue basil, to be sure.
Shriveled nasturtiums which barely had a chance at life
Thanks to another hot and droughty summer
(In spite of tropical appearance, they're actually happiest when it's not hot.
Among the odd lessons of a gardener.)
Hardier flowers may still live and even bloom again,
Could have one last flush of roses,
And the tiny sweet alyssum hugging the earth
Seem utterly unconcerned about this morning's 28 degrees.

Winter's chill in the air despite a glorious sun,
And I shudder to think of the long cold and dark weeks ahead.
Then amazing, miraculous and wonderful!
I see that after three years of tender care
The four-foot lilac at last has several buds.

Why do I love gardening?
The promise of future beauty
Even when it seems
The least likely.

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Like Yesterday I'm Young Again

Nancy L. Williams

Like yesterday I'm young again
Skipping down the stone-worn steps
Of our humble brownstone, mundane
Lines and peaks, softened
By the seasons, sweetened,
Mellowed by memories,
Yellowed and dog-eared as old photos.

The sun beats gently on my white socks
And stiff black patent leather shoes,
Warming the winter-weary toes of my soul.
I'm a little Barbie doll in my satin dress,
Crowned with straw hat and ribbon banners,
Playing little princess dress-up for Dad.
He sweeps down the stoop, leonine and regal,
Carrying my Easter basket of Sugar Daddies,
Green plastic grass and rainbow eggs,
Pale imitation to an awakening world.
Dad is in his wooly suit and starched bow tie,
For all the world a silly clown
But all the same a god to me.

He ushers in the sluggish spring with
Our Easter rite-of-winter passage,
Making it official, for now
I can smell the sweet smell of
Humus-peat, blending with peach tree
Blossoms and locust lavenders.
The earth is alive again,
Alive like my heart,
Alive like I was then.

On Communication
(in the style of James Kavanaugh)

Gerald Metz

I've been afraid of talk,
afraid to speak the truth of what I feel
because there is a chance
that such expression could destroy us.

We both know well that honesty can be a weapon
but it's not a need for bluntness that impels me,
only to be open with myself and you.

I've learned by now there are some talks
best shared most quietly with God alone
so this is not a wish to "tell it all"
just the hope for a chat over the fence,
instead of a muffled shout from behind a wall.

If we match the chance that truth could end us
against the certainly that silence will,
I'd say, "let's talk," and pray for flowers
after the rain.

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

A One-Egg Cake

Dara Llewellyn

My sister and I learned to cook
Making a one-egg cake.
In Mama's big yellow bowl
We stirred the batter with a wooden spoon.

Add one egg to flour,
Sugar, butter, and vanilla,
Necessary ingredients for cake
And, Presto! Our after-dinner dessert.

We took secret licks and argued—
About who would lick the spoon
Or scrape the bowl
Of the rich, creamy batter.

My sister made one cake
And decided she'd had enough.
I made one cake and decided
I was the Madame Curie of cuisine.

I could walk in our kitchen,
Tie on my cross-stitched apron,
And create wonderful compounds
Out of my powders and liquids.

Once I mistook salt for sugar.
They're both white crystals!
Daddy gamely swallowed a bite.
The rest got tossed out.

One June I discovered food coloring.
My favorite mix was blue and green.
Blue cakes with green icing
Graced our table all that summer.

If only I had known
How many meals to cook were before me.
If I had known of the endless dishes ahead,
Would I ever have broken that first egg?

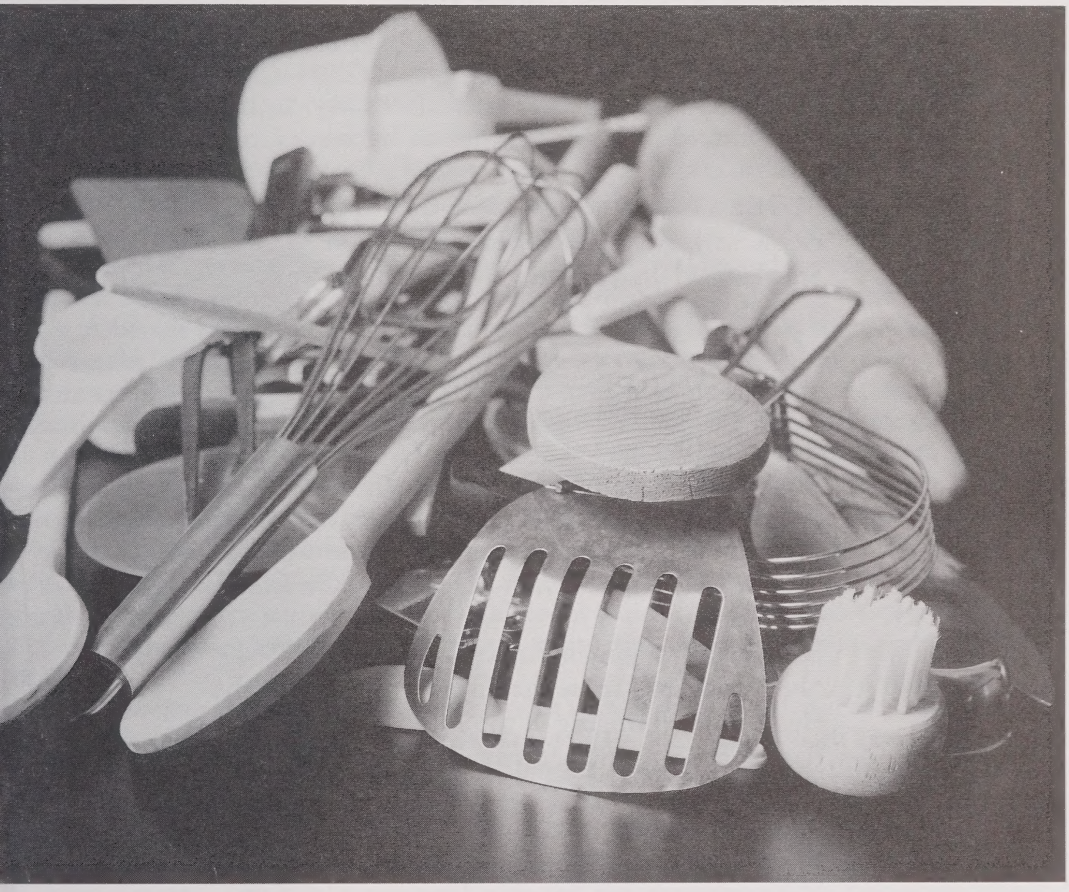


Photo by Robert O. Parriott

LeAnn Gets Lonely

Bill Brooks

Saturday nights they dance at the
VFW Hall where there's a picture of
Billy Westfall and other men who died
In war, heroes before they got old.

The music's loud and only one kind:
Country & Western: George Jones,
Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris, all
Those. And every Saturday night LeAnn
Gets lonely and goes and dances with any
Man who will ask her and they all have

One time or another and some she's gone
Home with after and woken in the morning
Startled and disappointed in life and the way
It treats you when you are unattached, as they say.

Some of them have moustaches and some
Thinning hair and some have crooked teeth
& beer bellies, and some are married to other
Women left lonely on Saturday nights stuck
Home with the kids and TV and long distance
Calls to their mammas in Florida. Some are
Women she works with at the factory. Girlfriends.

But you know, loneliness is a powerful thing
She tells herself those Sunday mornings when she
Hears the bell ringing in the sheep down at the
Baptist church, and can't always be helped.

Like it was its own sort of sin, like—"Thou
Shall Not Be Lonely"—and goes and brushes
Her teeth with her finger and tap water because
She hadn't planned on another night with some
Man in the Blue Moon Motel again. A toothbrush
In her purse would make her seem desperate.

& she realizes that all the really good songs
Are about love and other sad monsters and someday
The headlines in the local paper will read: War Hero's
Wife Found Dead of an Apparent Suicide.
But until then, LeAnn will just get lonely.

Pastiche

Bill Findley

One day last semester, while exploring Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" with my first-year literature class at A-B Tech, I surprised myself by suddenly blurting, "Two paths? Two paths diverged? Why two? Why not eight, or ten? The choice is never that clear, is it?" After several long, silent, fidgety moments, Tina finally said, "Hellllloooo, Mr. Findley, that's your poem; you can't accuse him of writing the wrong one, can you? Isn't that some sort of fallacy or something?" Nice of her to let me down easy. But I liked my question; it was more personally engaged than the typical text-centered question. Also, such impolitic explosions are useful, for they often lead to other discoveries, and I've been mulling over the exchange ever since—writing my own poem, as Tina suggested.

My poem would have eight or ten paths because, unlike Frost's speaker, I usually don't even know I've taken a particular path at all, much less one that diverged from another, until, or, more accurately, unless, I turn around and see it snaking away behind me. I seem very often to take action just for change's sake, for the heart-pounding anticipation of the unexpected and without thinking of the deeper consequences. Change restores and invigorates me. But I seem to need rather a lot of it. I have Attention Overflow Disorder; I'll pay attention to anything and I want to experience everything. For example, recently, on a whim, I moved to Asheville from California, where I had grown up and spent most of my adulthood. I didn't really know why I wished to move. Asheville had a closeness to outdoor activities I thought I would enjoy. More than anything else, though, it just felt right. I made a quick trip out here for a job interview and made the arrangements, and I certainly haven't been disappointed. But as time has passed, a vague realization has dawned that this time perhaps I was addressing a more fundamental purpose. I felt a visceral urge to be someplace where I could examine my life, alone, to find out what made me tick and to answer some questions about myself. Why do I seem to need change? Shouldn't I be repeating my experiences to some extent, carving out An Existence, instead of skittering across the surface of life? A man entering middle age should have a stable life. Instead, things happen to me; I attach myself to an offering only for a shadowy moment, or, much less frequently, I shake off the passivity and grab on like the hand of death. But it's always to something else, something other, a reaching out, never a rooting down. I move, but am I really getting anywhere?

The questions eddied about for a few months, swinging out in the current briefly, then stalling at the edge of the pool. Then some weeks ago, while going through a box of old magazines, I picked up a *New Yorker* and began reading an appreciation of the American composer Leonard Bernstein written by David Denby, the magazine's theater critic. He made some observations about Bernstein that hit home.

Leonard Bernstein was an American original—a pianist, composer, and conductor of both the Vienna and New York Philharmonic Orchestras, among others. What distinguished him from other classical composers of his time, the post-war 40s through the 70s, was his enormous range of interests. He was equally appreciative of both symphonic music and popular artists like Simon and Garfunkel, Elvis, and the Beatles. He was also a gifted teacher, conducting youth orchestras around the world and creating an outstanding television series called "Young People's Concerts" which I watched rather wide-eyed as a youngster, surprised to find that those boring symphonies my parents dutifully took me to could actually be interesting and fun. In his long career, he fused together in various ways elements of European classical music, American folk, bebop and abstract music and ballet of the postwar years, Broadway musicals (*West Side Story*), rock and roll, and film scores (*On the Waterfront*). A bit like me, he seemed to want to take part in everything. As Denby says, his temperament burst all categories. He scandalized the old guard with his eclectic approach, and critics vilified his attempts to combine symphonic culture

with popular music, calling it exhibitionism, accusing him of salesmanship and "cultural vaudeville." They were right; he was an entertainer the likes of which America had never seen. He rose to prominence just as television and the long-playing record were becoming mass media, and he reached an enormous audience. Yet in the end, despite an illustrious, a really remarkable career, he felt himself unfulfilled because he hadn't been able to sustain the writing of a defining, monumental symphonic work. On his deathbed he told a friend, "If I knew what I wanted to say, I wouldn't be sitting here now."

Bernstein's tumultuous, many-faceted personality interested me, and as I read I began to connect Bernstein's life with mine, to sort of appropriate Denby's view of Bernstein for my own needs, as we sometimes do when we read. And when Denby speculated as to why Bernstein was unable to achieve the brilliance he was after, I found a parallel with my life. Denby states: "Bernstein said, over and over again, that thematic 'development' was the grea contribution of Western music [such as the variations on the first movement, and the first four notes, of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—dadadaDA, which in astonishing inversions become the opening movement]." About Bernstein's work, Denby observes that "Bernstein created big statements on big themes, but most of his serious work he patched together from many sources, so most of his serious work lacks the toughness and rigor of great modern music. . . . He flirts with dissonance, with stridency, with harshly disconsolate moods ["modern" motifs] but he doesn't develop these gestures into the kind of formal structures that might raise them above mere portentous statements. . . . But perhaps a composer can generate an entire piece out of a few notes—as Beethoven did in the opening movement of the Fifth Symphony—*only by possessing a consciousness that rejects virtually everything except the possibilities of manipulating F's and E-flats. 'Development' requires intellectual unity: a man possessing many selves will instinctively wander into pastiche.*" [Italics mine.]

Pastiche in music is a piece consisting wholly or chiefly of motifs or techniques from borrowed sources. But pastiche in life! Perfect! What a find! My life has been pastiche—a pinch of this, a pinch of that, living here one year, there the next, with this or that person or group and this or that job. Copying personal styles of friends whom I idolized and studied, emulating teaching techniques, copying others' lesson plans. I'm living a puff-pastry life, all surfaces and texture, many selves layered together, inflated with hot air and done to airy thinness. And yet it still looks and sounds good: French, artful, civilized. How good to emote, grasping one's forehead, "At best, my life has been a pastiche." Much better than "My life has become a hollow, gaseous, sweet nothing." Denby's work provided some answers but also led to more questioning: So how do I find that "formal structure," or at least a measure of it? Can I create the unified consciousness Denby writes of? How much of life's offerings do I reject in order to achieve something of my own, something not borrowed, but really, essentially, mine? Am I capable of rejecting anything at all? Is it all "immediate gratification"? But then again, hey, if it was all right for Lenny, it's all right for me. I mean, Bernstein's pastiche was more creative and consumed than I might be at my most unified. Still, there was that last haunting line, the one from his deathbed . . .

I hurried forward, humming along in the grip of the character study. In suggesting pastiche as a defining metaphor for Bernstein's life, Denby asserts that Bernstein's greatness was in part precisely this instinct for gathering ideas from many, often contradictory, sources, for constructing significant work from so varied a mix. That Bernstein wasn't one to command his intellect to focus on only a few notes, that his range was wider than it was deep, Denby doesn't dispute. But Denby reveres him for trying to take on so much, for wringing the most out of existence in his fashion. In fact, Bernstein saw something about America that his critics didn't see, and today he is credited for the very thing that his critics crucified him for: his multicultural approach. He was one of the few voices in the arts who was successfully bridging the widening cultural gap between serious classical music, which for the younger generation (me) "no longer fulfilled its old American role as a form of cultural aspiration," and popular music. With music his language, he pioneered our modern ideal of

inclusiveness in the arts and, by extension, in all areas of society. He continually worked to resolve the "contraries" between classical and the new music by engaging his audience in intense musical and spoken conversations about the two rather than keeping them in separate and opposing camps. To couch it in more political terms, he made the familiar, the daily "low-culture" life, serious and acceptable, validating youthful voices, kids like Mike Rose's friends from the boundary, kids who were feeling snubbed by the heavy hand of a powerful, paternalistic cultural authority. Rose's marginalized buddies were from a different socioeconomic strata from me, and from my students at A-B Tech, for the most part, but the need for the young to be taken seriously cuts across all boundaries. This need simply exists, not as something to be proven or earned by making good grades or, in the insidious current phrase, "Taking responsibility for your actions," the import of which seems to be "Marry young, get a job, have kids, and support the church of your choice."

A major goal in my composition course is to facilitate students' broadening their participation in their culture as a means of taking action in a democracy. This might be thought of as the unifying aspect of the unification-pastiche dichotomy, but early in the semester I want them to delay such unifying closure. I want to help them tap into their natural, youthful exuberance and curiosity. In the first weeks, my energy bends like a dowser's rod toward freewriting, brainstorming, and drafting, encouraging students simply to move forward in their thinking and writing, privileging the creative over the critical, letting the product take shape only after much creative drafting. I try to empower my students by holding up their received ideas, even relatively whimsical ones, as worthy of exploration in essay assignments exploring a role they play, and in analyzing print advertisements, and in writing about the assumptions which underpin the wellsprings of behavior in their families and communities, and in assignments that involve interviews with people and situations that interest them. I consider my efforts a success if I've stimulated students to continue learning. I want them, especially early on before we begin to attend to writing argument, to be aware of the opportunities for meaning-making which evolve from their writing, to create meaning out of experience. They must let the world in, "try on" new ideas and borrow from others, allow for pastiche, but be metacognitively aware of their activity as I am only just now becoming aware of the elements of pastiche in my life. Life is something that they must let happen to them as well as something they must control.

Pastiche is The Bomb! More and more often I exhibit the Bernstein Impulse, scrapping the day's lesson plan (my students soon learn my syllabus is tentative) and cobbling together something at the last minute, trying to match the day's tasks with the most recent work from my students, work from a previous day's class leading into the next day's lesson. I lurch down the hallways with gobs of manila folders spilling apart, filled with possibilities, part security blanket and part ammunition for the elusive "right" moment—and often not used at all. But I want to be attuned, prepared to catch hold of any illuminative moment, to follow the class's progress in the most organic fashion, pasting my stuff to their stuff in ways that will eventually, hopefully, draw together from chaotic beginnings an organized essay. I encourage students from the beginning (after ten years, I know to start early) to allow themselves to express contraries in their drafting, to play "Believing" and "Doubting" games, to first discover and then embrace the ambiguities inherent in their lives, as embracing them is the first step in controlling them; to discover a point of view and then allow themselves the possibility of discarding some or all of it for another, stronger one, partly in the hope of revealing the tentative and contingent nature of knowledge which is, in the American philosopher Richard Rorty's neat phrase, "socially justified belief." Students in early stages of cognitive growth who are searching for True Authority resist this openness, are anxious about the ideas that scatter across the pages uncontrolled and unconcluded, and papers are sometimes late, but "good faith efforts" are many, and those who in the beginning of the semester feel that they have little to say and want to know how many pages they must fill often end up at my side a few weeks later as Cassandra did this week: "Mr. Findley, I can't stop this; I've

got all these pages" (thumbing through an impressive stack). I tell her to keep going until she feels like it's "finished." I'll extend the deadline. I'm quietly ecstatic as she stands next to me enthusiastically making decisions, "Maybe I'll type this up"; more thinking; "Yeah , I' type this up," she says, with a slight but perceptible gathering in her voice. "Yes, type that u and we'll look at it and see where it goes." At her level of experience and skill, the important thing is to keep going forward; the attempts to resolve will come. Take the eight or ten paths that diverge in the hidden wood. But is this asking too much of students? Am I behaving recklessly? After all, there's a real danger in leaving them out there; these are ofte students who want and need structure, not because they are used to (an overabundance of) in high school, but also because they may not have the metacognitive capacity, or the life experience and scope, to embrace such uncertainty. I wonder. I must create assignments which privilege wide-ranging inquiry of this sort but which don't stretch the boundaries too far, which stay within the zone at which they can succeed, but need a teacher's help.

Leonard Bernstein is by now a boon companion. It isn't simply that he succeeded so we in resolving the musical generation gap, and that Denby interpreted it, thus giving shape to my rationale. What also intrigues me, in view of my peripatetic background, is the characte trait that had him attempting this formidable task, something that goes beyond teaching to life itself. Denby states: "What was unusual was the strength of the contraries within Bernstein, and his eagerness to act on all of them at once. He was more energized, rather than paralyzed, by ambivalence." Here was another answer to my nagging questions: There something of this sort of energy in me, too. Ambivalence is something I struggle with, two generations after Bernstein, because life holds so many choices, a chance to be so many "selves," and I want to grab them all so I don't miss anything. Certainly today, if we are interested in the search for "intellectual unity," the paralysis of which Denby speaks is more of a danger than two generations ago. The sheer volume and variety of social demands, let alone economic pressures, create more anxiety than ever. Yet if I don't struggle for meaning I run the risk of becoming overwhelmed with the choices available and thus squander my potential; I trade the temporary struggle with self-doubt for the very secure winding-sheet o an unrealized life, for a paralysis which keeps me from venturing beyond a lifestyle that limi my "becoming." I am using this anxiety, this excess, this disunity, this disharmony, tapping into the energy created by the ambivalence. And surely I am better equipped than Americans of previous generations to deal constructively with this ambivalence, better able to create a unity which will sustain me in my attempt to create a rounded life. Although my essay has so far concerned itself with finding whatever is "essential" in myself, I am also informed by its "contrary," as expressed in social constructivist theories that have become a staple of my early composition class mini-lectures—that throughout life, in the early stages of learning anything, we "patch together" an intellectual unity; we need people, culture, to provide models from which we borrow Identities until, instead of allowing the models to lead, we can take the lead, sufficiently aware of our own needs and desires to do our own creating from our own inner resources.

When I first began living alone, about four years ago, after experiences with roommates over the years and more significant others, I tended to oversimplify, and life degenerated to sluggish, uninspired monotony. The negatives weighed heavily: the occasional loneliness, the quiet, the lack of structure which my social life had provided to give a shape to my days and nights. I then compounded the situation by moving across the country where I was eve more apart, and for awhile I lived like a cloistered monk. In a new place, the opportunities for inspiration do abound, but so do opportunities for "expiration," in slow, rhythmic snuffling snores on the couch at mid-day, the seduction of nap-time overwhelming the desire for self-improvement. Intending to simplify, I just subsisted, simplifying by stuffing all sorts of things into closets and behind doors and under the bed. I tended to "let things go"—magazines tossed on the floor, papers unsorted and tossed into boxes in a corner of the spare bedroom, laundry spilling out of the basket, dustballs wafting across the living room floor.

Once or twice I caught myself rationalizing that it was easier to let the dust gather and then ick it up by hand rather than use the unwieldy vacuum cleaner.) I comforted myself by alling the mess "an agreeable clutter." Now I see it as a fallow period, perhaps necessary fter the dramatic change of address, a necessary passivity.

I began to snap out of it this Christmas, when a small, insistent inner voice suggested I unker down at home for the semester break instead of leaving town for a few days as I sually do. Energized by the ambivalence, the tension, and still needing a change, I began to esolve contraries without realizing it. I needed to do something—anything—yet I also felt he need to maintain a bit of self-discipline. I decided to invest in *The Joy of Cooking* and ome kitchenware. Suddenly, life was good! In the kitchen I could safely resolve contraries n a meaningful way (and pamper myself at the same time). I began resolving the contraries f, on the one hand, recipes perfected to the letter (rigor), and, on the other, entire Chicken Parmigiana dinners for eight consumed alone in two days (gesture). I countered the contrary f eating on the run (a pastiche lifestyle) by cooking my meals (evidence of intellectual nity). Now with my more inclusive outlook, what I had thought might be a character flaw s reinvented as one pole in a dialectic, ambiguity as ethical compass. If I stray into pastiche, t least it's pastiche with intent. After a day's work, I can be gloriously selfish, completely ree of others' wishes and needs. I can veer toward a golf course or head down to the river nd stay out till the last trout rises in the late evening. And with my wide-open social alendar, I'm free to await, and then immediately act upon, any sudden inspiration—a spur-f-the-moment gallery tour after a lengthy lunch, the spirits imbibed carrying over to create nspired interpretations of the excellent artwork in Asheville's excellent galleries. Or, after a ong walk alone during the winter's first good snow on the closed-down Blue Ridge Parkway, might feel free to discharge excesses of feeling in a "First-Snowfall-Pub-Crawl." (Start at he bar in closest proximity to the point at which your car can no longer climb the hill into lowntown; this winter's snowy Friday, the starting line was "Tunatini's." Next year, inter-sted persons may meet on the day of the first snow at 4 pm on the Parkway, Hendersonville Road exit.) Or I might stumble across a piece of junk that needs refinishing, or just curl up ill the wee hours with a book. I might veg on the couch flicking the remote instead of going ut to enrich my life by seeing a play, going to a gallery, hearing live music, or taking salsa essons; and laziness (informed laziness, mind you) sometimes causes me to miss out on ighbrow pursuits which should occupy a bigger part of my schedule—culturally uplifting istorical tours, symphonies, dinner parties for eight—the higher arts. But I'm in tune with he process, trying to qualify the pastiche nature of my life now, finding a balance between ome life and social life, employing appetites for work and for play, unifying the appetites nd expectations.

Denby concludes: ". . .[T]he conclusion of this success story is painfully ambiguous. To he end, Bernstein remained a violently divided spirit—split not just between his loyalties to America and to Europe but, in his own person, between his sense of obligation, which led im to be very publicly a Jew, a heterosexual, and a composer of serious music, and his need or pleasure, which led him to be a flamboyant conductor, a homosexual, a fantastic talker bout music, and a Broadway showman. It may seem a paradox that a man so disharmonious vithin himself would try to bring everyone together. But a more unified person could not ave raised so many hopes, touched so many people. Whirling about, Bernstein showed his ace, at least momentarily, to nearly everyone who wanted to derive some energy from vherever his gaze happened, at that moment, to land."

I have the feeling that Mr. Bernstein would not have considered the heat [energy] of his aze as important as the results. I do know that as a teacher, I wish to touch people's lives, to aise hopes. But I also believe that one must work, accomplish, achieve, make something asting. A commitment to the process of embracing contraries is not enough. We need the roduct. Embracing without attempting to finish seems almost cowardly now in view of Bernstein's heroic efforts to do both. Bernstein, who accomplished so much, sometimes

despaired that he didn't have time "to find himself." I have given myself that time, though I don't feel that I have asserted myself as I could have. Yet I am pleased to find that I now have a clearer perspective on how to manage my life and a greater acceptance of my inner needs.

Obligation and pleasure, unity and pastiche. Pastiche is the hot outward glance, the grasping at straws; unity, the cooling force that draws together. And this essay has become an exercise in resolving the pastiche of many scattered ideas, begun in the narrative mode and resolved toward traditional academic discourse. I began writing on a late fall evening, sitting on my back porch, freewriting, just as a gigantic, clumsy beetle smacked into the wall, then launched itself, clattering like a small helicopter and weaving drunkenly toward the angelic lightening bugs rising from the grass across the way. All of which seems to have nothing to do with the finished essay. But perhaps the meandering nature of its flight? Its quest for beauty? See, that's already quite a lot.

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Plus Ça Change

Gerald Metz

Spring slept with Massachusetts last night.
I smelled her breath in Maine this morning—
Scent of lusty giving. Yes!
She's on her way!
My coat's off:
Come, girl! I'm ready for you, too!

The time of buds is not for frogs.
White weasels never meet the ants.
Minds, too, know a season's change
And hearts have tides.
Beware, then:
Today well-loved, tomorrow, left!

Since last I saw you my tide's turned.
My boat has come about: yours sails
Onward, and you're out of sight.
Your iron "yes"
Is rusted:
It cannot crush my granite "no!"

Ravenous

Will Hooper

You just stand there
swerving that rifle
like an extended finger
pretending not to remember
that time we hunted squirrels
after the first frost—
ol' Fred, he treed three of them—
pinned halfway up an old oak.
You held that rifle then
as flat and still
as a white cloud's belly;
or the snow in the woods last January.
We ran between leafless trees—
skeletons rising from a frozen white grave;
dry bones standing
waiting for the winds of spring
to breathe into them
and cover them with leaves.
We chased ol' Fred between
those big dead sticks and
he shoved his nose in the snow
and flipped it in my face.
Now ol' Fred, he's running in circles
and you've got that rifle in your hand
tracking him like a treed raccoon.
That last one he treed
still bites him back so hard
he's even scared of water.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Jack Johnson, A Novel (excerpt)

Bill Brooks

The wan light of a new Paris morning falls softly into the room. A black man, sleek with muscle, bare from the waist up, shadow boxes while the woman sleeps on the bed. The boxer's hands flick the air, strike like snakes at an invisible target. He moves and punches. *Snap, snap, snap.* He bobs and weaves, throws uppercuts and crosses and hooks. He throws the punches so all the power flows outward from the shoulder into the massive fists. *Snap, snap, snap.*

He has the grace of a ballerina, the instinct of a bullfighter. He has rather slender legs for a man with such a muscular torso. Although there is now a slight paunch around his middle, he still has the hunger of his youth, the fierce need to punch away anything in front of him. *Snap, snap, snap.* His bare feet whisper along the carpet as he moves. He is sleek and restless as a caged panther.

The woman stirs, he barely notices.

He remembers how it felt to lay into Tommy Burns, Jefferies, Langford … all the others. How it felt to smash them down.

From the window he can see slate roofs, soot-coated windows and a hundred blackened chimneys. In the distance, the Eiffel Tower looms against the glaucous sky. A far cry, he thinks, for a down home Texas nigger. *Snap, snap, snap.*

His skin is damp with the effort. He pauses, lowers his arms, feels the hammer of his heart, strong and steady as a gandy dancer laying track. He finds the unlit cigar on the nightstand next to the bottle of Scotch whiskey, most of it gone. There are two glasses, one smudged with lipstick. He strikes a match and takes a deep draw on the cigar and exhales a blue ring of smoke. Then, clenching the cigar between his teeth, he goes back to snapping jabs, the smoke curling up in his eyes. He circles and feints and slugs the air with his fists.

Pigeons strut along the ledge of the building across the way. Strut and coo like streetwalkers. *Snap, snap, snap.* The cigarette smoke forms a wreath round his head, causes him to look like a dancing angel, like a black wraith coming through the fog. He is the embodiment of Othello in a Paris hotel room. And on the bed lies his Desdemona, the latest in a long line of Desdemonas.

He circles and sticks.

He can feel their bones breaking, Tommy Burns and Jim Jeffries and the others. He can see their skin splitting open as he hits them. The white boys never held up like the coloreds. Their faces would turn red and puffy before splitting open. They'd get that look in their eyes— that fear that told him they were finished even before they went down. You couldn't tell with a colored man. Take Gunboat Smith, them big feet of his. He never hit any man harder than he did ol' Gunboat, and yet he didn't see a mote of fear in his eyes nor a tremble of his mouth.

Snap, snap, snap. Jab, hook, right cross, uppercut. You hit a man hard enough with an uppercut you drive his jaw up into his brain. The key is to bend a little from the waist, stand flat-footed, come up with everything you got just as he's moving in. Set him up with the jab. Pester him with the jab, like flies on a drunk's face. Make him want to work his way in. And when he gets angry and comes to you, then bring it up hard. All the way up from the floor hard!

He can see them sinking to their knees, their eyes rolled back in their crumpling faces, half-dead, or wishing they were. You knew when you hit them right. The feeling goes all the way up your arm into your chest. Feels like a hammer striking an egg.

Something makes the pigeons explode from the ledge. He pauses long enough to see what's got them stirred up: a big orange tomcat pounced all over one, the delicate head hanging limp from its mouth. Wings akimbo.

Then rain sweeps across the roofs and smudges the sky even grayer.

Paris, he thinks. What the fuck I doing in Paris?

Soaring with the Wind

Gabrielle M. Thompson

When I was a young girl growing up in idyllic Southern California in the 1950s, the community where I lived was well established, with houses built by individual builders, each having a character of its own, not the disdained tract homes and planned communities that became so prevalent in the next decade.

Trees were planted—every front yard had one. Ours, a California Redwood, was said not to fare well in our sunny clime, yet it quickly outgrew me and was over twenty feet tall when I left my childhood home at nineteen. Abutting the sidewalks in front of our homes, a three-foot grass median separated the walk from the street. Along its greenery, the city had planted oaks which sent their wide branches overhead to offer beauty and shade. They never lost their leaves in the temperate weather.

One particular tree, however, stood above all others in magnificent splendor at the distant end of our residential street. It was older, statelier, and more mysterious. At its base, a bronze plaque gave proof to its uniqueness. Over one hundred feet above, in the top branches, bald eagles had built nests since the time of the Spanish conquistadors. It was not a well-known site or regularly visited by the populace of the town. The eagles were seldom seen, except on high. Encroaching cities drove them ever-distant in their search for food. The surrounding farmlands disappeared during my youth as bedroom communities sprang up from Los Angeles to San Diego. By the time I moved away, the eagles also had departed. But in those early years, they were my familiars. Our common bond was the wind. The eagle tree was the altar where I worshiped nature on windy nights.

When the wind blew and rattled the windowpane next to my bed, it called to me, and I could not resist. Dressed only in pajamas, even, at times, in baby dolls, I would climb out the window and race barefoot down Oak Street. Under the moon's rays, or in the jet darkness of a new moon where the occasional street lamp cast elliptical spotlights on the street corners and gave way to dancing shadows of the wind's creative sculpture, I ran the six blocks to "my" tree. The wind would buffet my pajamas, my hair would flow like Medusa's snakes, and I would feel as if I were flying. In actuality, I was the proverbial good girl—never wild, disruptive, disrespectful, or disobedient. This was a world away from that reality. When the wind wove its magical spell, it pulled me from my bed. I followed without question. It was never a conscious decision; I just went. It never occurred to me that this was "wrong." I was never frightened. This was amazing because at the same time in my life I had come very close to being kidnapped in broad daylight. Yet I never felt these nighttime escapades put me in peril. They were my freedom—the only times in the city that my spirit was free to soar.

The darkness could not prevent the eagles' enjoyment of the wind, either. They would take flight for the pure joy of riding the escalating currents. Once, in those years of a pubescent girl's visitations, one of the eagles graced me with a close encounter. I say graced because it imparted such a sense of wonder and awe to see it land on a nearby branch, when always before they had been flecks on the wind above me. Even with the ferocious stare of the raptor and the knowledge that its talons and beak could rip me

apart, I knew no fear. It was as if he had watched me in my nocturnal visits and finally decided to acknowledge me—as if he had recognized the wild, kindred spirit in me that suffered the constraints of city life. It was enough, to have this singular view. On other nights the feel of the wind on my skin and in my hair and the sound of the trees as they gave their joyously rustling response to its caress were enough.

In my late twenties I left city life on a seventy-five-foot sailboat. For twenty years I lived on the sea, the wind my magic carpet to see the world. I learned to respect and even to fear the wind, having battled storms of fifty knots with heavy seas and having lived through Hurricane Hugo's one-hundred-and-fifty miles-per-hour destruction of the islands we called home.

As I write, now nestled in my Western North Carolina mountain cabin, I listen to the wind weaving its spell in the forest that surrounds me. It moans as it swirls through our cove—a deep, foreboding sound. The storm outside is the furthest reaches of Hurricane Floyd, which battles the eastern portion of the state in these dark hours before dawn. I no longer have an eagle tree, but I let my mind soar as I step out onto my front porch, waiting for the sunrise and giving thanks for the abundant wildlife that visit our acreage. The young girl that raced down the city street has found her home.

Photo by Mary McClurkin

Salt Takes the Bitterness Out

An excerpt from a book about tracking my father into the wilderness of Alzheimer's

Tommy Hays

As we cross into South Carolina and coast down the mountain toward Greenville, I keep my foot on the brake. The minivan squeals around the curves. Connie, my wife, naps beside me with her seat tilted back. In the rearview, I see Max, our eight-year-old, drawing a dragon with his markers and in the far back, Ruth, our five-year-old, bobs her head and sings along with a Kindermusik tape. I'm glad my family is with me. It makes me part of a concerned constituency and not so much a son on his way to confront his father.

Daddy is losing his memory. He's also incontinent. And what prompted this trip is that he has started falling. Mama, suspecting Alzheimer's, has pleaded with him to see a doctor. Has even gone so far as to make appointments for him, which he backs out of at the last minute. My brother Chris, always diplomatic and good at talking with Daddy, flew down from Charlottesville a few weekends ago to talk him into going. Daddy refused. So I'm not sure how I, the one Daddy talks to the least, can change his mind. After all, he hasn't set foot in a doctor's office in thirty-five years. Why would he want to go now when the diagnosis would be nothing but bad news?

Connie opens her eyes when we stop at a traffic light in Traveler's Rest, a little town just twenty minutes north of Greenville. She sits up in her seat, yawning.

"I can't do it," I say.

She yawns again and stretches. "You can do it."

"I keep thinking about that time he lunged at me."

"He's much more mellow than he used to be," she says. And it's true. Daddy has been much more agreeable the past year, as if he has forgotten his bitterness.

"What if he tells me to get out of the house again?"

"It's important you stay calm no matter what he says."

Ruth is singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" at the top of her lungs. Max clamps his hands over his ears and rolls his eyes. Ruth holds up her fingers. "And it's one! Two! Three strikes you're out of the oooold baaaall gaaaame!!!"

I have been dreading this talk with Daddy ever since I decided to go through with it. I have been dreading it for years. But I decided to try because of Mama, who has retired recently, and after nearly fifty years of going to work every day, deserves to do things she enjoys—work in the yard, go to the symphony, travel. Instead, every moment is swallowed by some new need from Daddy. It's as if he has paced his deterioration by how available she is.

What I don't know is how Daddy will react to my bringing up his seeing a doctor. I'm afraid we'll have a replay of that awful exchange he and I had at Thanksgiving dinner six years ago:

My brother had come down for the holiday, and we were all at the supper table, except for Max, who was two years old at the time and circling the table, chattering about something, when my father had said gruffly, "Oh, shut up, Max!"

I stiffened. When we were children, our parents, especially Daddy, had drilled into us that "shut up," along with "stupid," were the worst things you could say to anybody. "Don't talk like that to Max," I said.

Daddy set down his fork and turned to me. "Never," he said in a low, angry voice, "never talk to me like that!"

"I will if you talk to Max like that!" We sounded like children ourselves.

"Out!" he said, rising to his feet and pointing to the front door. "Get out of my house!" He came at me, sort of, but even six years ago he was unsteady on his feet, and seemed to topple toward me. Chris pulled him back down in his seat.

"Get out!" Daddy repeated.

"Fine!" I said, throwing down my napkin. "Fine!"

"Don't, Tom," Mama said to Daddy. "Don't," she said to me. There was an awful pause, when everyone was quiet. Max, not having the least idea what the grownups were screaming about, decided to move to the living room couch.

"I was just kidding the boy," Daddy glanced regretfully in Max's direction. Then, without another word, he went upstairs.

"It didn't sound like kidding to me," I said after he had closed the door behind him.

"To me either," said Chris.

"Go talk to Tom," my mother said to me, getting up to clear the dishes.

"Tom didn't mean anything," Connie said to me. "He just reacted."

"Why should I apologize? He's the one who told Max to shut up." I pushed my plate back and looked at my brother, who shrugged. Then I gave a dramatic sigh, threw my napkin on the table and stood. I opened the door to upstairs, paused on the first step, then walked slowly up. I found Daddy sitting in a chair, smoking.

Before I could say anything, he said, "I shouldn't have spoken to you that way."

"I'm sorry," I said, trying not to cough in the smoke-clouded room. Daddy, who had smoked three packs a day for fifty years, used to smoke at the dinner table at the end of every meal, but over the years we had driven him upstairs with our complaints, which had gotten stronger after the children were born.

"You know," he said, "I can read minds." He gave me a hard look. "I don't try to read them," he said. "I can't help it."

"What do you mean?"

My father shook his head gravely, as if what he had read in my mind was unspeakable. I guessed the worst, that he believed I wished him dead.

Over the years I had kept my distance. He made me uncomfortable. This had not always been true. When I was a little boy and even into my high school years, we had been close. But as I moved into my mid-twenties, our conversations became strained. Daddy became preachy as he tried to pass on his mystical beliefs, which had grown out of decades of reading Thomas Merton, Huston Smith, Einstein, Bagwan Sheree Rajneesh, Joel Goldsmith, Meister Eckhart, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Adam Smith, William James.... The list went on and on, and so did his lectures. He would give me books, and I would try to read them. But the language was so abstract, so philosophical, so high-flown that I would find myself yearning for the mundane, the sensual, the ballast of the embodied moment. I turned to fiction.

While Daddy moved up into religion, I moved down through story. I set aside the

books he gave me and picked up Eudora Welty, James Agee, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Malamud, Steinbeck, Saroyan and many others. Not that Daddy hadn't read most, if not all of these. When he was younger, Daddy read nearly a novel a night. But in the end, he believed fiction was beside the point, even a distraction from the point.

While perhaps I should have been touched that he wanted to pass onto me what mattered so much to him, I did not have that kind of distance or insight. And as the years passed, it became harder for me to talk to him. Whenever I was around him I felt I wasn't profound enough. Everything was too little to talk about. So perhaps he could read my mind. I was always relieved whenever he opened the door and went upstairs, leaving the rest of the family to talk about the weather or new neighbors up the street or funny things the children had said. Although I never consciously wished Daddy dead, perhaps I did want him out of the room forever.

"Does Max get on your nerves?" I asked, as he tapped his ashes into an ashtray.

"Max is fine," he said.

I stood there another minute. I wanted more. I wanted him to say Max was exceptional, the apple of his eye. I wanted him to tell me a story about him, something Max had said or done that had impressed him or made him laugh. I wanted specifics. I wanted my father to offer up a beautiful detail about my son.

Daddy looked at me and said, "I love you." He hadn't said this to me since I was a little boy. He stood and hugged me, and I was reminded he was not some ethereal consciousness. I could smell the smoke in his shirt and feel the bones of his back.

He sat down, and I lingered with him up there, not knowing what I felt anymore. And then I went downstairs, leaving Daddy to finish his cigarette.

I returned to the women below, who were in the kitchen putting away the food, and my brother, who was washing dishes.

"I've never seen him like that," Chris said, setting a plate in the dish drain.

"Tom has a temper," Mama said to Connie, then looked at me. "You are a lot alike."

In a little while Mama called Daddy down for dessert. And we resumed our places at the table, including Max in his booster seat next to my father.

"Good, huh?" said Daddy to Max, who, having finished, had smeared a good portion of pumpkin pie on his cheeks. Max started to get down. "Hold on, there." Daddy reached over with his napkin and tenderly wiped my son's mouth. Our family was restored, sort of.

In more direct, more openly emotional families, this scene with my father might have been a relatively small thing. But in our quiet family, all of us with PhDs in avoidance, it was nothing less than upheaval. Daddy and I never argued like that again, because neither of us wanted to. I tried to relax and allow Daddy to be himself around Max, even if that included reprimanding him. For his part, Daddy never said "Shut up" to either of our children again.

When we arrive in Greenville, Mama has lunch waiting. Daddy eats slowly and says very little. The conversation flows around him, like around a stone in the middle of a river. I try not to watch him, feeling voyeuristic, but my eyes are drawn to his shaggy gray hair and his unshaven face, so uncharacteristic of the immaculate father I grew up

with. Mama can't get him to shave regularly and he hasn't showered in months. She sponges him off as much as he will allow. She says his toenails, which he won't let her cut, are grotesquely long. The image is too intimate for me. I don't like knowing about my father's toenails.

After lunch he goes upstairs to smoke, and Connie takes the children up the street to the neighbor's to play. Mama, who has finished washing dishes, says to me, "I'm going with them." She hangs up her apron and heads out the door. Everybody wants to be out of the house when Daddy and I have this talk.

When I walk upstairs, the heat is stifling. Mama had new air conditioning put in, but Daddy shuts off all the vents. He wears padded sweat pants and a flannel shirt and still complains of not being able to get warm.

The only light comes from a lamp in his bedroom, which is just around the corner. There is an entire wall of bookshelves, which Daddy had a contractor, one of his Waffle House friends, build when they moved in. But the shelves are too long so they sag. Daddy wedges his books tightly into the shelves to keep out mildew. I run my finger over them. No dust.

Across from the bookshelves on the other side of the room is his work area. Daddy has fashioned an L-shaped desk out of a long mirrored table that he'd built for our first house's foyer and then against that he has set up two old card tables, giving him plenty of work surface. There are hundreds of pencils, pens, erasers and Exacto knives.

Spread out on the tables are cropped photos of pretty women, local girls trying to look like models. Many of them are in swimsuits. I'm not sure if Daddy took these pictures. He uses various kinds of spray or ink to make silhouettes of the women, giving them an ethereal, shadowy quality. This is his art and he has explained it all to Chris at some point.

"Daddy?"

I hear him shuffling behind the bathroom door. Maybe he has just brushed his teeth. He comes out. "Yeah, honey?"

"Can we talk?" I ask.

"Sure."

"Upstairs or downstairs?"

"Doesn't matter."

I'm tempted to suggest downstairs but decide he'll be most comfortable on his own turf. "How about in your room?" I go back to his room, remove his clothes from a straight-backed chair beside his bed. Then I turn another cushioned chair at his makeshift desk so that it faces the other.

Daddy sits in the chair at his desk, which is really an old Formica kitchen table with a metal vertical file—little cubby holes, which hold index cards he has scribbled notes on, cigarette lighters, letters and bank statements (where later I will find a couple of thousand dollars in cashed social security checks). Across from his bed, he has made a kind of cardboard bureau by taping small boxes together. Everything upstairs feels improvised.

"I wanted to talk to you about how you're doing, about your health." I take a deep breath. "You're important to us, to Max and Ruth, and to Connie and to me, of course." I sound stiff and overly deliberate.

"That's nice to hear," he says but frowns as if he doesn't understand what I'm driving at.

"You don't seem to be doing very well," I say, shifting uncomfortably in my chair. "You know how you've mentioned to me several times about your memory not being what it used to be?"

"No." He shakes his head and smiles, indulgently.

"Several times over the past year, when we've visited, you've said you have trouble remembering things."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

I sigh. He doesn't remember enough to remember he is forgetting.

"Also your bladder," I say. "Mama says you're having trouble making it to the bathroom."

He looks up at the ceiling as if trying to listen to what I'm saying. It isn't until a little later in the conversation that I notice the giant stack of Depends adult diapers underneath his desk. Several times I'm tempted to point them out, but that feels cruel.

"You aren't walking very well," I say. "You have trouble moving. You have trouble sitting and standing."

I name a few other problems, but the whole time he smiles and shakes his head like I'm speaking a foreign language. Finally he says, "I find this all very puzzling."

As we sit there it becomes clear that Daddy isn't going to get angry, which gives me a little more courage. "Mama said you haven't been interested in seeing the doctor."

"Your mother doesn't understand that there are many different realities." He picks a piece of lint from his pants.

I try another tack with Daddy. "I'm worried about Mama because she's finding it harder to take care of you."

"She doesn't need to."

I'm not sure if he means she doesn't need to find it hard or if she doesn't need to take care of him.

"But, Daddy, what if she weren't here?" I hear my voice get louder and I sit up in my chair. "What if she weren't here to feed you, to help you shave...." My eyes wander to the Depends at his feet.

"I don't mean to imply that she's not helpful," he says.

I almost laugh. I want to say, Helpful, hell! She is all that stands between you and a nursing home! But I remember Connie's warning to stay calm, and I hold my tongue.

"Your mother is an extraordinary woman," he says. He says this several times and clearly means it. "It used to upset me that she didn't understand me, but it doesn't anymore. I'm used to people not understanding me. I've felt that way ever since I was a child." I had never heard him say this.

"If you won't go to the doctor for you, will you go to the doctor for Mama's sake?"

"I'm perfectly fine."

I find myself studying the old lamp on his desk. I remember it from our living room on Victory Avenue. It's dated looking, seventies-ish and gives off a dingy light.

"If you're firm in your beliefs," I say, "then it shouldn't matter one way or the other if you go to a doctor." Under my shirt, little beads of sweat roll down my sides.

"If you're really committed," my father begins, "then you can't accept a reality you

don't believe in." He pauses. He pauses a lot. "It wouldn't be a problem if your mother didn't make it a problem."

"Whenever Mama talks about your beliefs it's always with respect, and she has tried to honor them over the years. But now she's at a loss."

"Oh."

Occasionally I am aware of how incredibly hot it is. My head begins to throb. It seems even hotter in his bedroom, close to a hundred degrees, a purging heat.

"Why don't you go out anymore?" I ask.

Daddy cocks his head as if he doesn't understand.

"You are naturally such a gregarious person," I say. "You like being with people. But you're becoming more and more..." I bring my hands slowly together, and he watches. "...confined," I say.

"Confined," he echoes. "It's only natural." At first I think he means it's only natural that as one gets older, one has less energy for getting out.

"It's natural to want to love and be loved," he says. He is referring to my comment about his liking people. He hasn't heard what I said about his world narrowing. And here I should have brought up his sleeping sixteen hours a day every day, but, in the end, it wouldn't have mattered what I said.

"You do seem more sort of just up here," I say, indicating his room. "More cut off from the rest of us."

"If that were true," he says, frowning as if thinking very hard, "I believe I would feel lonely, and I don't."

"Good." I drop my hands into my lap. "Good." It strikes me as more than a little ironic to be pointing out to him his various ailments, especially if he doesn't see them as such.

"Mama feels frustrated," I say toward the end of our conversation. "She needs help. And I think it would be a demonstration of your love for her to see a doctor."

"It wouldn't be a problem if she didn't make it problem," he says. He pauses. "She is an extraordinary woman."

"You could just go and meet this guy."

"What guy?"

"This doctor she's found."

"Oh."

I take out my handkerchief and wipe sweat off my forehead. Downstairs I hear the front door open and the children run inside. I look at my watch. We have been up here nearly an hour. It's time to head back up the mountain. We have a party we're supposed to go to. But I sit there a little longer, because I'm not sure I'll sit up here with him ever again.

"I don't know what to tell you, Thomas," Daddy says. Throughout the conversation he has called me "Thomas" instead of "Tom." "Thomas" always felt more affectionate. "This hasn't been very satisfactory, has it?" he says, which is the closest he comes to admitting there might be a problem.

He slides a cigarette out of the pack on his desk, then goes out to the main room, looking for a lighter, and I follow him. This is probably the longest I have ever been with Daddy that he hasn't smoked.

"I don't want you to worry about me," he says. "I don't want anybody to feel isolated." I'm not quite sure what he means, but I know he's making his best effort to respond.

"Why don't we go downstairs and see what the kids are up to?" I ask.

"Okay," he says and slowly we descend the stairs together.

"My head is killing me," I groan as I drive through busy downtown Greenville, which has been a little too chicly revived with galleries, street cafes and coffee shops. "You think he'll go to the doctor now?" Connie asks, digging an Ibuprofen bottle out of her purse.

"He says there's nothing wrong. And who am I to say there is?" I rub my eyes, trying to massage the pain away.

Connie hands me a couple of Ibuprofen and the water bottle she brought on the trip. "But it's not fair to Mama," I say, swallowing the pills.

We stop at a gas station on Poinsett Highway, a desolate, treeless section north of downtown. There is nothing chic about this stark section of town. And I barely have enough energy to pump gas. Sleepy-eyed, Ruth smiles at me weakly through the back window and presses her hand against the glass. I press mine over hers and wonder just how far off the day is when she and Max will have to worry what to do about me.

Connie drives us back up the mountain, the children fall asleep, and I lean back, shut my eyes and try to rest. But I keep seeing Daddy sitting there with his amused smile, as if his failing health is a matter of my failing perception.

I open my eyes. "I don't know if I'm up for this party." The party is for a friend of ours, a pastoral counselor, who has just received his doctorate in divinity.

"When y'all came back downstairs," Connie says, as we gain the top of the incline and cross back into North Carolina, "and we were all just sitting around in the living room, there was a different feeling between you and your father."

"Really?"

"Like something had been settled."

By the time we are in Asheville and at the graduation party, my headache has let up. The party is a potluck at my friend's boss's home, an airy wood-frame house set deep in the trees. We sit outside in the shade of immense sycamores, drink iced tea and eat from paper plates laden with pesto, tabouleh and fruit salad. The people—mostly ministers, pastoral counselors and their families—couldn't be friendlier, yet I feel out of place, as I do at parties. And I'm still tired from being with Daddy, tired down in my bones, as if I've given blood. The conversation around me, while warm and hospitable, is full of Biblical references and counseling humor.

Then a creamy-complexioned, dark-eyed woman, an Episcopal priest in training, who has been sitting across from me with her husband and their three-month-old baby, sets her plate down and matter-of-factly begins to nurse her baby. I look away, but when I see she doesn't care, I watch her downturned face and how she pours herself into the baby.

The serenity of that image and the pleasant banter of these good-natured people so schooled in their beliefs suddenly have me longing for my fierce father sealed upstairs in his heat, wrestling with reality—a stack of Depends lying in wait.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Sisters of the Rainbow Waters

Gabrielle M. Thompson

The sugar mill ruins lie in shadows around us, testimony to the slave revolt that wrought its destruction. Old coppers of various depths that once bubbled with refining molasses now hold water from recent rains and reflect the silver sliver of the moon on their surface. We build a fire on the beach and begin smudging one another with sweet grass and sage. The combined herbs smolder in an abalone shell, an import from my birth state of California. It was there my husband and I built the ship that brought us to these islands. To direct the smoke, I gently wave an eagle feather over the yawning mouth of the shell. The quill is decoratively wrapped in leather with fringed trails sporting Virgin Island shells. It was a gift from my friend, now my sister, Muffy, who is the impetus behind this group we call Sisters of the Rainbow Waters. Each new moon we gather to praise the Goddess and honor our femininity.

After the cleansing process of smudging, we turn our prayers to the seven directions—and the colors, plants, minerals, and virtues they represent. The east, area of new beginnings, is first. The eagle soars in the east, connecting us with the heavens and our higher selves. The color is yellow, like the sun which rises in that direction. A woman sits in the place of each direction, and her accolade gives her own piquancy to the blessing. I sit in the south, the color red, the place of blood, and of women. It is also the place of green growing plants, the mouse, and the coyote. An avid gardener, I have a special affinity with this place and relate my spiritual growth to the abundance of the earth. The mouse is gentle, yet hard working, and nurturing of its young. The coyote, the trickster, teaches us to laugh along our path. It is he that gives me the most pause for thought. Laughter is what I want more of in my life. When we finish with the last direction, we sing:

We all come from the Mother
and to her we shall return…
like a drop,
of rain,
flowing to the river.

The moon represents the dark side, hidden intuition, mystery, age-old wisdom, and is the feminine aspect of the occult. The new moon was the time when aboriginal women menstruated. They did not have artificial light to affect their normal cycle. Many indigenous groups had special moon lodges where menstruating women congregated during their moon time. The "grandmothers" and adolescent females cooked and cared for the tribe at these times. Having lived on a boat and spent years in close proximity with another woman who sailed with us and having lived with no electricity in those early years, I had experienced first-hand the way women's bodies adjusted to the same monthly schedule. Even now, in spite of all the influences of modern society, over half of us still menstruate with the moon's waning.

On sheets of paper, by the light of the fire, we write what we no longer wish to have in our lives—our shortcomings, our upsets, our problems, our anger. Some lists are short some not. As a woman chooses, she can state these aloud, or not. The process takes

time as most women wish to share their burdens in the hope of clarity through group wisdom. The lists are then thrown into the fire, in symbolic ending. After a prayer, the feather is passed around the circle. Each person closes her eyes, meditates, and then says whatever word pops into her mind. One of us records these words. After the last participant, the recorder reads the verbal gifts in different cadence and groupings until the "message" becomes clear. It is different each month but never fails to amaze us in its importance to each of us. We close the circle by stating what we wish to grow in our lives as the moon moves into its fertile fullness.

The beach around us is deserted. We shed our clothes and walk into the sea, hand in hand. In the crystal clear waters, now dark with shadow, we float on our backs, watching the moon's Cheshire smile above. We *are* nymphs, no matter what the weight or size of our bodies; we are all beautiful. I know I will be leaving soon, moving back to the "big island up north." I wonder if my life stateside will be as full, if I will find women friends who complement me in my need for ritual to express my gratitude to the Great Spirit. It is in this time, my moon time, that I am most happy to be a woman. I wonder if men realize what they miss—this depth of love, bonding, and recognition with the Goddess, Mother Earth, and the feminine self. As women, we are so lucky. We can love men and have husbands and families, yet still love our sisters with joy in their being. It is a deep knowing, a bonding that is heartfelt. Perhaps it is because we see life through emotion, through our hearts.

I share my thoughts with Muffy. She is a wise woman, the only one of us trained by a Native American Wise Woman. She is certain I will find what I need in my venture north. She reminds me at this very moment women all over the world are joined together honoring who they are and the Mother who nurtures us all. Even if I do not find connection in my community, I can take this night of the new moon to meditate and do ritual and, in doing so, will be one with those on my spirit plane. Her words give me strength. I know I will not be able to replace the companionship I have found here, but I will evolve other relationships that will succor my spirit.

Killing
Every
Memory
(of you)

Thomas Gore

With a yellow glow and a growing warmth,
Your face bubbles, bursts, blackens,
And releases the swarm of memories
That sting my face with the truth
Of your lies—

. . .

I can almost hear you calling my name.
To remember the sound of your voice
Only makes me want to hit
(—your face, yes, I see it, I'll admit—)
the wall.
I remember all you said to me
(. . . I promise . . .)
(. . . you won't regret this . . .)
And see how much I was willing to believe
Because of you.
After too many second chances, you threw the last away.

. . .

—Your face,
Your smile,
Your frozen gaze
Curl and turn to ash in my hand.

For now, I'll just believe you're gone.

Photo by Mary McClurkin

Thai Lessons

Lee Sokol

In the mid-1980s, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in northern Thailand, teaching English at Chiengrai Teacher Training College. I grew up in a family of Kennedy worshipers, so I had known since seventh grade that I would one day join the Peace Corps. In addition to idealistically wanting to make the world a better place, with my BA in Anthropology, I wanted to learn about another country's customs. I never dreamed I would get a first-hand lesson in Thai funeral customs.

I had my lesson in these customs when one of my best Thai friends died. Kesap taught chemistry in the science department of the college. All eight teachers in the department took turns cooking lunch for each other every day in one of the science labs. They asked me to start eating with them so they would have a native speaker to practice English with. After only a few weeks of this business-like arrangement, I grew to be very fond of these teachers and to have great respect for them, especially for their sense of humor and play. Kesap was a year older than I and single, so the other science teachers enjoyed joking about our getting married so Kesap could get his green card and I could "learn by doing" about Thai marriage customs.

One Thursday morning we received the horrible news that Kesap had wrecked his motorcycle the evening before. He was driving back from town and hit a bicycle that had no lights. Strangely, the bicyclist was not hurt, but Kesap was critically injured. He lay in a coma for a day and died that night. When we received the news from the hospital, I kept asking why he hadn't been wearing a helmet—it might have saved him. My Thai friends responded that if it was his time, a helmet could not save him. They didn't fight it like I did. As Buddhists, they knew it was his karma, and they were prepared to accept it. They immediately turned their energies to funeral preparations and telling stories about Kesap. I had read that Thais do not want funerals to be sad and it seemed that they were setting out to prove the truth of that. Kesap was known as a "joker man" and that is how they wanted to remember him. One of the science teachers asked if I would make cookies for them the next week and I said yes. He said he would be happy to eat Kesap's share.

We spent the next three days at the temple with Kesap. (Because his death had been violent and unexpected, the laying out could not be at his house—it would be too dangerous to have his unhappy ghost in his home.) When I arrived, Kesap was laid out on a bed, with his right hand hanging over the side, suspended over a large silver bowl. I was given a small silver bowl of water and directed to join the line of family and friends walking on their knees to Kesap's bedside. One by one, we told him goodbye while pouring water from our individual bowls over his hand and into the large bowl on the floor. Then we walked away on our knees.

After this ceremony, Kesap was put in a casket, which remained in the temple and was very much a center of activity for the next few days. Whenever we ate, someone put a small dish of the food on the end of the casket, knocked on the casket and said, "Kesap, come eat. We have rice and curry. And a little glass of Mekong whiskey, too!" The first night, no one remembered to give him food and the next day one of the

:eachers said that Kesap got angry and stomped his foot at the end of the casket. In ıddition to keeping a constant supply of food on the casket, his friends also put his ɔeloved cowboy hat and the manual to his Apple computer on top of the casket.

People busied themselves at the temple for the three days by cooking meals for the :rowd or by helping to decorate the flatbed truck that would carry the casket from the :emple to the crematorium. Banana stalks and watermelon rinds were intricately carved nto leaves and flowers—these would be attached to the sides of the truck. Several :eachers embroidered Kesap's name and dates of birth and death on funeral fans for the ıine monks always in attendance. (Nine is special in Buddhism since it is three times hree. Three is a holy number because Buddha was born, received enlightenment and lied all on the same day of the year. Three also represents Buddha, his teachings and his lisciples.) On Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening, these monks sat in the front of the :emple and spoke of their memories of Kesap. My Thai was not good enough to follow nuch of what they said, but the Thais kept breaking out in laughter. A group of Thais aughing is a glorious sound—the entire group laughs up and down the scale in unison.

Through all these activities, I never saw anyone crying, though I couldn't stop myself rom frequently tearing up, sniffling and even sobbing. Finally, one of my friends turned o me and said, "You cry really well." That gave me visions of being a paid mourner at a uneral march during the Black Plague.

On the final morning, there was a special service with 31 monks because Kesap was ·1 years old. After the service, we gave food to the monks for lunch. After they finished ·ating, some people ate lunch at the temple and others went out to restaurants because here was not enough food for so many people. I was leaving for a restaurant, but my riend Penpun stopped me and said that Kesap wanted the science teachers and me to all at the lunch he'd made. He and another teacher always cooked lunch on Mondays and ince this was Monday, he had cooked lunch for us.

After lunch, Kesap was moved from the temple to the crematorium. Just before the asket was put in the oven, it was opened so everyone could say goodbye once more. Before going up to the casket, we were each given a slip of paper with a Buddhist blessing n it. As we walked by, we tossed the blessings into the casket so they would burn with Kesap. After everyone had said goodbye, the casket was closed and moved into the ven. When the iron grate on the oven was locked shut, Kesap's family finally broke own. He had a younger brother who was a student at the college and lived with him. or four days, he had been in control of himself and taken charge of everything necessary or the funeral. When that oven door closed, he sobbed and grabbed onto the grate and ould not leave. One of the teachers finally had to drag him away.

We all missed Kesap very much, but it was not long before the Thai sense of humor ame back into play. Shortly before his death, Kesap had given me an old black and hite television. The science teachers jokingly asked if I was not afraid that Kesap's host would appear to me on the TV screen. They said if he did, I should ask him for the inning lottery number.

Truth

Nancy Dillingham

Without the sun
the yellow leaves
lighten the morning

Golden in the hills
they burn
turning the world mellow

their message muted
beauty dazzling truth
ruthless before nightfall

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Untying Cora

Jan Cavanaugh Graham

Once when I was about 8 years old, I was sitting lazily on the front porch of the pink ottage in one of the old, freshly-painted rocking chairs. I loved Pamlico at night ecause the wind seemed to pick up in the evenings and the pines swayed in the moon-ight over the water. Occasionally, a boat would go silently by in the dark, lit up with oft yellow lights. As one was going by, I felt a mixture of fear, excitement, and dread. Being young and not familiar with that feeling as I am now (now I call it premonition nd inherited it from my mother), I decided that something terrible was going to hap-en. In my youthful mind, I decided that something "terrible" to me would be that I ould die in my sleep that night. So, I didn't want to go to bed. But Mama and Dear, ny grandmother, insisted that I get into the top bunk bed and try to go to sleep. I lay here a long time listening and feeling and, then, I did finally drift off to sleep.

It seemed that in an instant, I woke up. Something had awakened me; I didn't now what. As I lay there, I realized, without actually knowing, that the boat had fallen here Daddy had jacked it up over the water today. The water was rough. I could hear creaking. I thought the boat would sink!

I still remember the cold floor of the painted cement porch as I ran through to my Mama and Daddy's room. I hesitated then because I could hear the snores of my daddy nd was afraid to wake him. What if it was nothing wrong at all? I shook him awake nd told him that the boat had fallen. He answered, as I had expected, that I was just reaming. I insisted that he go look; so, to humor me, he pulled on his old fishing pants nd went barefooted out to the pier in the semi-darkness. I stood shivering at the screen oor.

He came quickly back to the cottage, going to wake my grandfather. The boat had llen. The rope had broken. The boat would sink if something wasn't done immedi-ely. My grandfather, in his striped pajamas, came out of his room, peering around ithout his glasses. When he rummaged through the back porch to find a rope, he uldn't find one. There was no other course of action but to go to Mr. Brock's for a pe.

Mr. and Mrs. Brock lived in the little white cottage with black shutters that jutted t towards the water's edge like a little houseboat. Mr. Brock answered the insistent anging on his door with watery eyes squinting behind his thick glasses. His skinny body as visible through his thin white bed shirt that fell way past his knees. He had a little hite bed cap on his head. Even at that urgent time, I was keenly aware of the distinct nell of his house—a mixture of the last night's supper, some kind of rubbing liniment, ewing tobacco, fresh paint, and, well, just their own old family smell.

My dad told Mr. Brock we needed a rope. The yellow nylon one with the burned nds that kept it from fraying had broken under the strain of the boat and it was in anger of sinking. Mr. Brock rushed off to untie Cora.

Now Cora weighed about 225 pounds. Where Mr. Brock was lean, Mrs. Brock was t. She had massive arms and legs and wore low-heeled black pumps that could be eard on the linoleum floors of their humble place as she prepared the usual supper of

banana and peanut butter sandwiches. We loved to hear those pumps head to the porch and over the blast of her "stories" in the afternoons she would call my sister and me in for a whole pack of Dentyne chewing gum each As sweet as we knew her to be, the truth was that Cora was suffering from senility and believed that poor, little Mr. Brock had another woman living in their attic. Mrs. Brock would get up in the night to try to catch this woman in her kitchen or in her bedroom stealing her underclothes. Mr. Brock had soon realized that when Mrs. Brock got up, she usually fell, and he would have to struggle to lift her massive bulk back on the bed. So, as any sane, loving and kind-hearted husband would do, Mr. Brock tied Cora to her bed at night. And we needed her rope!

Quick work was made of untying Cora, and Mr. Brock hurried back with a thick white rope with fraying ends that was used to save the boat until morning could come and the boat ramp could be repaired.

I was a hero! I had saved the boat from sinking! I can still remember my granddaddy telling Charlie Suggs, Guy, even Mr. Foster (and all of the gang) the now famous story. And I learned that premonitions were not something to fear but a gift from my mother and God. I learned to welcome them as a unique sixth sense.

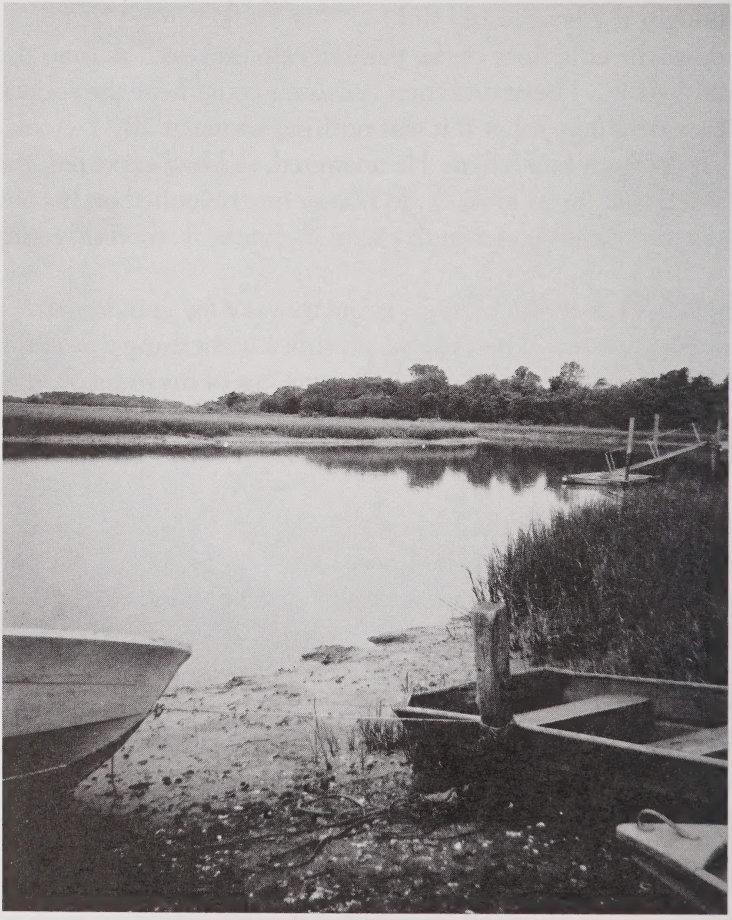


Photo by Mary McClurkin

Whips and Chains

Nancy Dillingham

I

Summertimes, my daddy's Uncle John sat in a black coat and hat on the high front porch of his house beside the creek, legs crossed, scrutinizing the world with distant eyes as it moved up and down the road before him, and, on occasion, when I passed him coming down the lane that joined our bottom land and said "hey" to him in a breathless little syllable because Mother said be polite, his voice, dry, low, when he spoke to me, whistled by my ear like an alien, cold wind.

II

Before, when Uncle John's wife died, Daddy swore that on the night he sat up with Aunt Dock's body before the funeral the next day the devil dragged chains up and down the stairs at midnight and that everyone else who was there that night heard the noise also, an awful sound. He was so spooked he never went into Uncle John's house again, and, thereafter, when Mother mentioned Aunt Dock's name, Daddy always got that look in his eye like a trapped animal and bolted from the room.

III

To hear Daddy tell it (and the others who were there), the door to the room where Aunt Dock lay in her casket somehow jammed just as the chains were being dragged up and down the stairs. According to the story, a powerful force of wind came from nowhere into the quiet of the room and the stillness of the night and blew the door shut. Inexplicably it stuck as if by suction—maybe it had swelled from the rain the day before—the house was near the creek—and everyone was a prisoner suffocating in the small room for what seemed an eternity of time before they managed to force it open again. Daddy said they made a long, human chain of their own and tugged as one in a frightful act of desperation until they pulled it open and breathed again. Daddy beat a hasty retreat into the night.

IV

Whenever Daddy or anyone else told that tale, I imagined a different scenario completely. It was Aunt Dock herself dragging the chains up and down in a final act of revenge. I had heard the tales about Aunt Dock who had long red hair, painted her face and wore dangling earrings. Daddy laughed somewhat nervously I thought and cast a sidelong glance at my mother when he said that Aunt Dock liked "to throw one back," meaning she liked to take a drink of whisky like the men, and said that Uncle John had tried to tame her, to "break" her like a horse and that she was a "handful." Daddy added, always in a mock-serious tone with another wary glance at my mother, "You have to break a horse, don't you?"

Mother always took it up at that point and told a more lurid tale—that once Uncle John had cornered Aunt Dock in the barn loft and had almost beaten her to death. He used the horse whip. Every time they told the tale I trembled as I imagined him flailing away as she tried to dodge him, and Daddy invariably looked sheepish and uncomfortable.

V

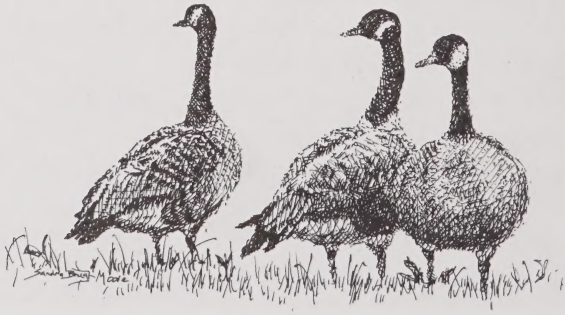
He had to break her like a horse so that she would be fit to ride. I imagined him flailing away with the horse whip as she tried to dodge him, to fend off the blows, to protect her face. I saw the wild, frightened look in her eyes and imagined the cold that shook her to the bone, the hay frosty and stiff as icicles—no warmth anywhere in the cold isolation of the barn loft, certainly not in Uncle John's menacing, lusterless eyes, cold with fury. I felt the sting on my cheek as the horse whip connected. I felt the searing pain. I tasted the blood and smelled the mustiness of the hay as Aunt Dock fell, face-first, bleeding into it. I gasped for breath with her as she felt his body on hers, suffocatingly heavy, felt the whip, a makeshift bit between her teeth, silencing her screams, felt her submission to the final indignation as he branded her forever his and she drowned in his workmanship of it.

VI

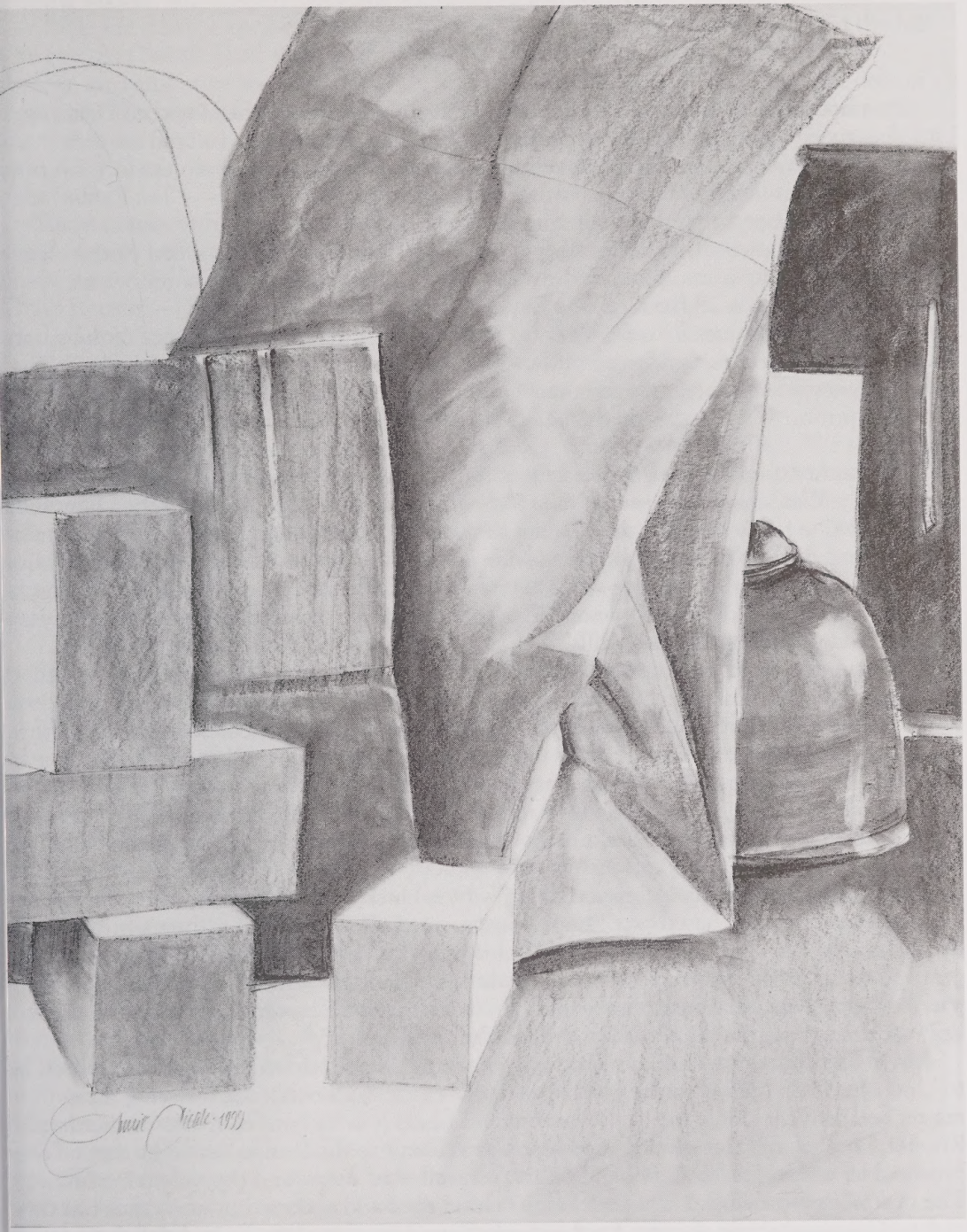
Whenever smoke curled out of Uncle John's chimney in an "S" shape—for Satan?—I wondered aloud if the devil were coming after Uncle John for his evil deeds. Child, you do have such an imagination, my mother said. But then something happened that made them all think twice about my suppositions. One day when Uncle John was attempting to shoe his horse, a normally docile old mare, she kicked him in the head, killing him instantly. Daddy said he had a brain hemorrhage. The night before the funeral I peeked over the rim of the casket and looked at Uncle John. I pressed one finger into the hoof mark on his head. It was hot to the touch.

VII

After that, the horse was generally unmanageable. It roamed the pasture among the chokeberry and thorn bushes. Daddy fed it. One morning I went to the pasture alone, and through the fence I gingerly touched the mare's flank and ran my hand down to her hoof. She lifted it and placed it in my hand. It was hot to the touch. I looked into her eyes and gently stroked her head. The early morning sun caught on her mane and it glowed red.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore



Drawing by Annie Cicale

A Fox Hunt with Uncle Joe

Richard B. Hurley

On a hot summer afternoon in July 1954, I'd seen Uncle Joe at the Haywood Café after Little League practice. In keeping with his established tradition when I would see him downtown, he bought me a double-decker chocolate ice cream cone for ten cents. I was truly excited when he offered to take my brother and me fox huntin'. Jim Ab— "Jim Rabbit" as Uncle Joe called him— and I got our knapsacks together. They were Army surplus from World War II, coupled with woolen sleeping bags—same vintage—and ground cloths. We bought them for fifty cents apiece at the Army Store on Main Street in Canton where we lived. Uncle Joe took all the food, the water, and the foxhounds.

Neither a firearm nor a jug was ever taken on his foxhunt since the essence of the sport was listening to the music of the hounds and bragging about whose dog was in the lead. The elusive fox was always the faster and more cunning, and could bring the chase to an end at will by returning to its den for the night. Naturally, on a foxhunt lively conversation was plentiful!

Our mother dropped us off at Uncle Joe's, where his green '48 Jeep was parked, loaded with a few gallon jugs of water and Uncle Joe's weathered hunting gear. I watched him stroll out of his white frame house as the summer sun was setting. He wore boots, brown tan duck-back hunting pants, a red wool shirt, and wide greenish-yellow suspenders with leather fobs. He had to collect only a few more items before we would be on our way. I watched him as he gathered his cold-handle frying pan and black-stained coffee pot—both veterans of many a foxhunt in the Haywood County hills.

The sun dropped a little deeper behind the Champion paper mill as Uncle Joe walked from the back porch carrying his silver kerosene lantern. Its slick, worn, gleaming finish spoke to its many nights on the mountain. After filling the lantern, Uncle Joe replaced the potato on the kerosene can spout, knowing that the wick was ready to last till first light.

Jim Ab and I jumped into the Jeep at Uncle Joe's command, and we were off into the now cool air of a typical Canton summer night as the crickets and katydids chanted their greetings to the mountain men seeking the serenity of a star-peppered night atop a mountain ridge.

We stopped at Trantham's service station where Uncle Joe directed the filling of the Jeep's gas tank and purchased two Tampa Nugget cigars—just enough for the night-long hunt. Jim Ab, who was born on Uncle Joe's birthday, sat in the middle straddling the gearshift, while I got to sit next to the open air in the doorless vehicle. The dash light and parking lights were burning as we adjusted our feet around the lantern resting on the tarpaulins, which covered the floorboard of the old flathead Jeep.

From Trantham's we crossed Newfound Street and headed down Hilltop Road, which led to Uncle Joe's dog lot and to the audible welcome of the Walker hounds knowing their master had arrived. Uncle Joe lit the lantern and I held it as he entered the lot and ordered Rooster, Powder, and the other named hounds to submit to the leashes which he carried over his shoulder with their leather hand holds, their well-used snaps, and their clanking links. The makeshift wooden gate closed, leaving behind the barking dogs that would not run this night. The moon shone the way for the sturdy green Jeep as we left the lot behind.

We drove on as the cool summer air penetrated my thin brown jacket. Eventually, we left the blacktop pavement of Newfound Mountain in favor of the hills where the Walker hounds ran in pursuit of the red-back fox. We parked the little green Jeep and hefted our knapsacks. Uncle Joe handed us both a leash with two dogs each and we started up the mountain. The kerosene lantern, which Uncle Joe carried in one hand, lit the way with the

aid of the glowing moon as my brother and I were pulled up to the ridge top by the strong, yearning hounds who already knew the scent of the wily fox.

Uncle Joe tied the pack of hounds to two of the many fence posts which dotted the hill as he greeted Carroll, Fred, and Hershel, who were already there sitting by the biggest campfire my eight years had seen. Jim Ab, who was eleven years old, and I thought only of warming by the blazing fire as our aging uncle dropped his haversack on the "Joe Burnette side of the fire," and stood tall as he asked his fellow hunters if the hounds had yet struck a track. Carroll said that they had and suggested that Uncle Joe "turn loose" and add his dogs to the chase.

The race was on! The hound music rang loud! Clear barks and humorous conversation were the norm with only the occasional interrupting voice of Uncle Joe when he said, "Hush! Listen!" We knew to stop talking and to savor the unique deep voice of each hound. "That's Rooster—Hush!—Believe Powder's picked it up! Yep, that's him! He's a coarse-mouthed dog!" proclaimed Uncle Joe. We knew to continue our silence when he spoke, his hunting coat covering his tall, slender frame beneath his graying hair. His leathery face was stoic, knowing, and content. The fox race progressed as each hunter claimed his dog had the lead position. Bragging rights were a fundamental part of the sport.

Around one in the morning Uncle Joe said, "Boys, could you eat a little?" We said that we could as he reclaimed his hallowed spot by the fire and brought forth his black cold-handle frying pan and ancient coffee pot. He told us that it was neither ethical nor proper to cook before midnight as he stepped away from the fire and said, "Jim Rabbit—pour some wash water over my hands and we'll cook a little!" Grease popped, whole wheat bread emerged, and mustard was spread. We ate thick, juicy hamburgers, with taste enhanced by the fragrance of the mountain air mingled with the thick scent of hardwood smoke.

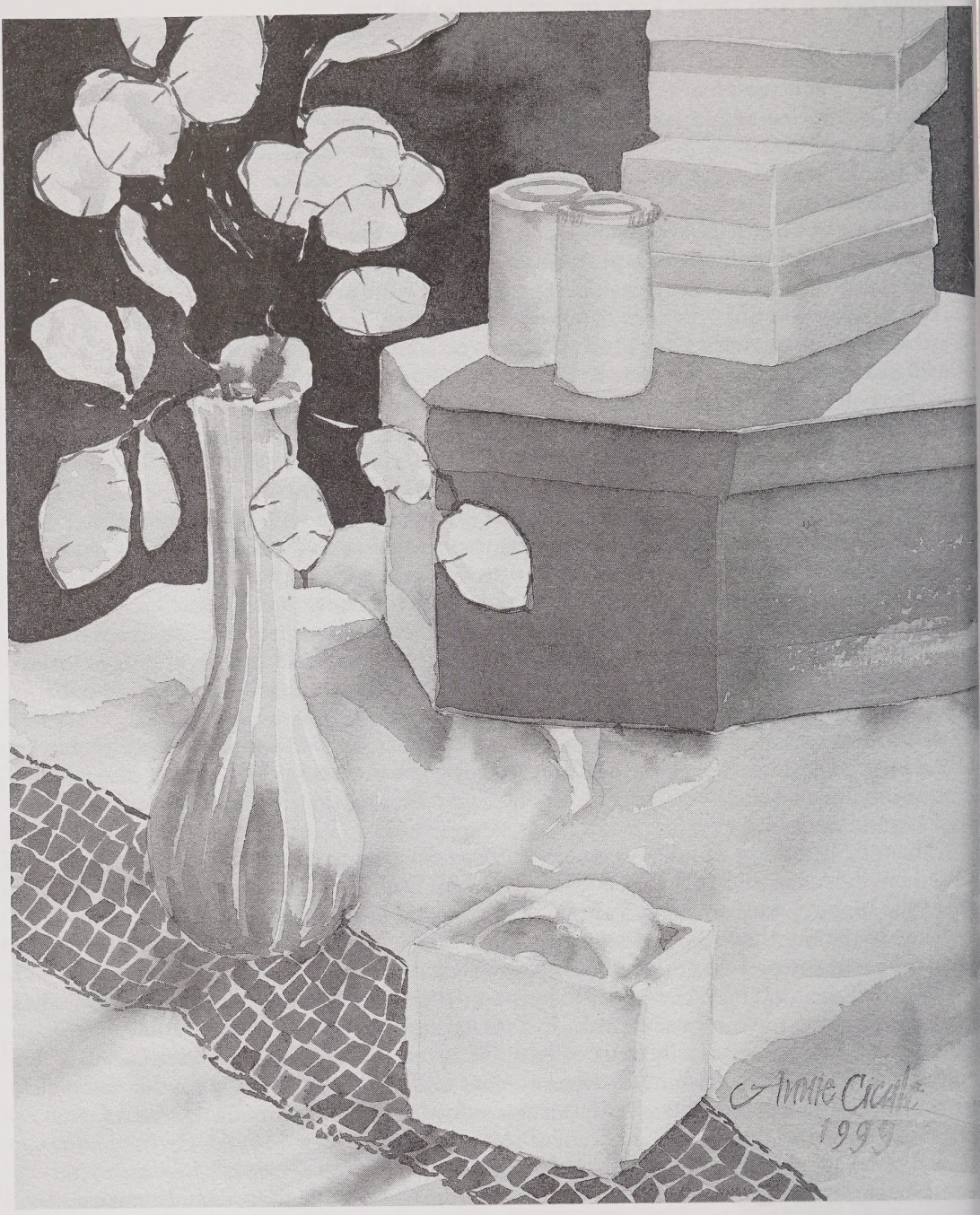
The coals whitened as Uncle Joe burned out the cold-handle frying pan and more locust wood was piled on the fire. He phrased out a catchy tune to which my brother and I fell asleep.

The dawn sprinkled us with the summer dew as Uncle Joe pulled the blanket closer over us and asked if we had slept warmly. We dozed a few minutes more and awoke to the aroma of bacon frying over the stoked up fire. Eggs would soon find their way to the pan and we would eat once more.

The fox race had been run and the grown-ups talked about the tremendous chase we had missed having fallen asleep. Uncle Joe stood up with his hunting horn pressed to his lips and called the hounds, announcing the chase's end. The mid-morning sun signaled to us that it was time to put out the fire and pack up our gear. We had to pull the tired, balking hounds down the mountain and load them into the dog crate in the back of the Jeep.

We were yawning from the late bedtime and the new experience as Uncle Joe dropped us off at our house at 75 Newfound Street. In our familiar beds we slept away the day with intermittent dreams realistically flavored with the scent of hounds and dog bread, fresh coffee and bacon, the drone of the hunting horn, the bay of the Walkers, and the rhythm of Uncle Joe singing his trademark song— "She began to whistle and I began to dig. Believe to my soul t'was a whistlin' pig!"

This was a foxhunt with Uncle Joe, the peerless patriarch of the sport. Like green '48 jeeps, those days are gone—as are Uncle Joe and Jim Ab—but the decades-old memories are crisp and warm and lingering when July days are hot and long and the distant bark of a Walker hound echoes off a mountain ridge. Those days were genuine and uncomplicated, and they made for special recollections. I miss those days very much when a bold, bright, yellow-white summer evening moon starts to awaken behind the treetops of a hazy mountain knob.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Praying for Peonies

Nancy Dillingham

When ice backs up
and gives way to water
and rain and spring

I find myself
praying for peonies

lush like hills
suffused with the patina
of multi-hued greens

soft as shell-pink clouds
at sunrise

As morning hangs heavy
and fog wraiths mingle
among trees

dampened with dew
and drenched with light

I dig in the dirt
and pray for peonies
pushing tubers towards earth

tremulant for beauty
and for birth

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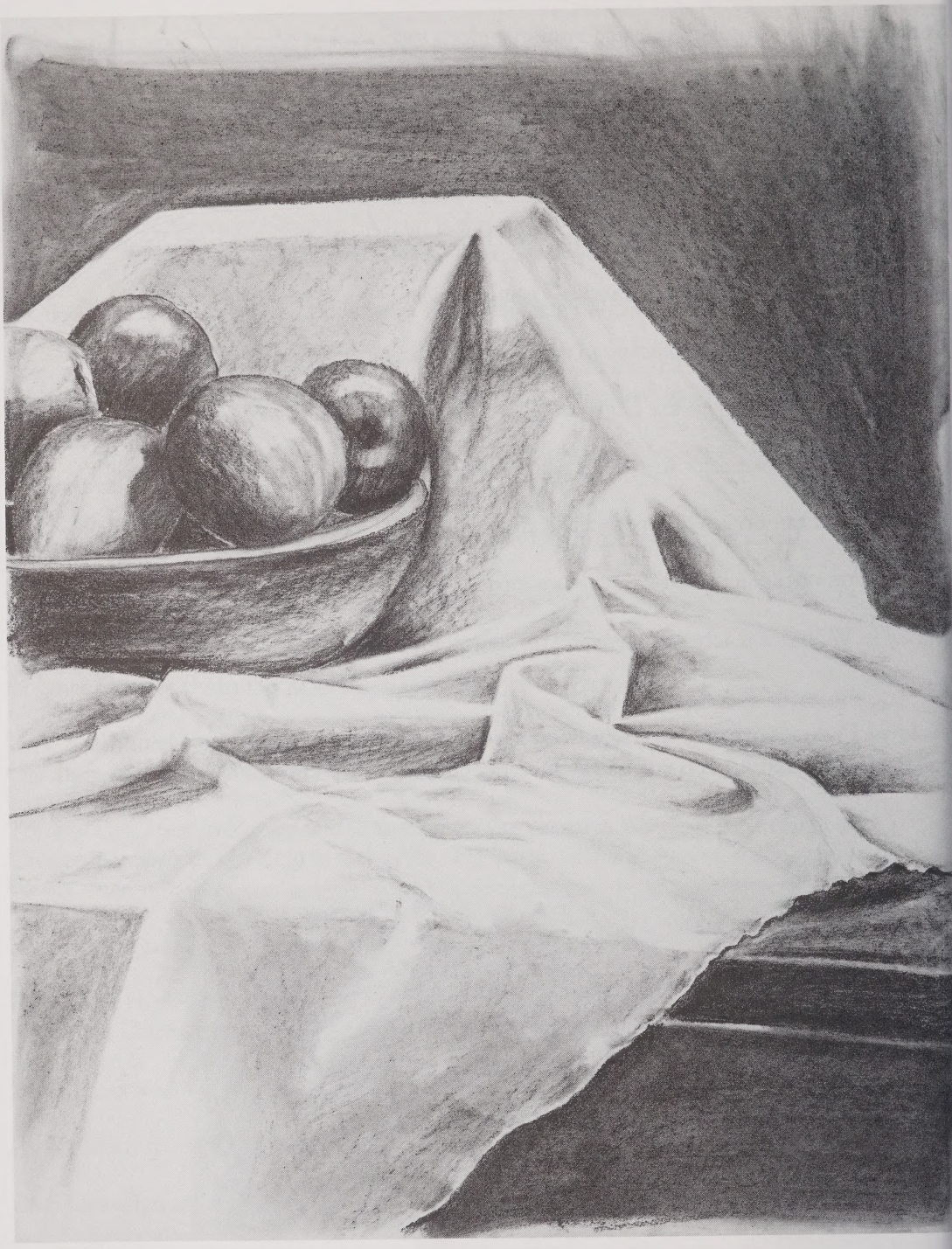
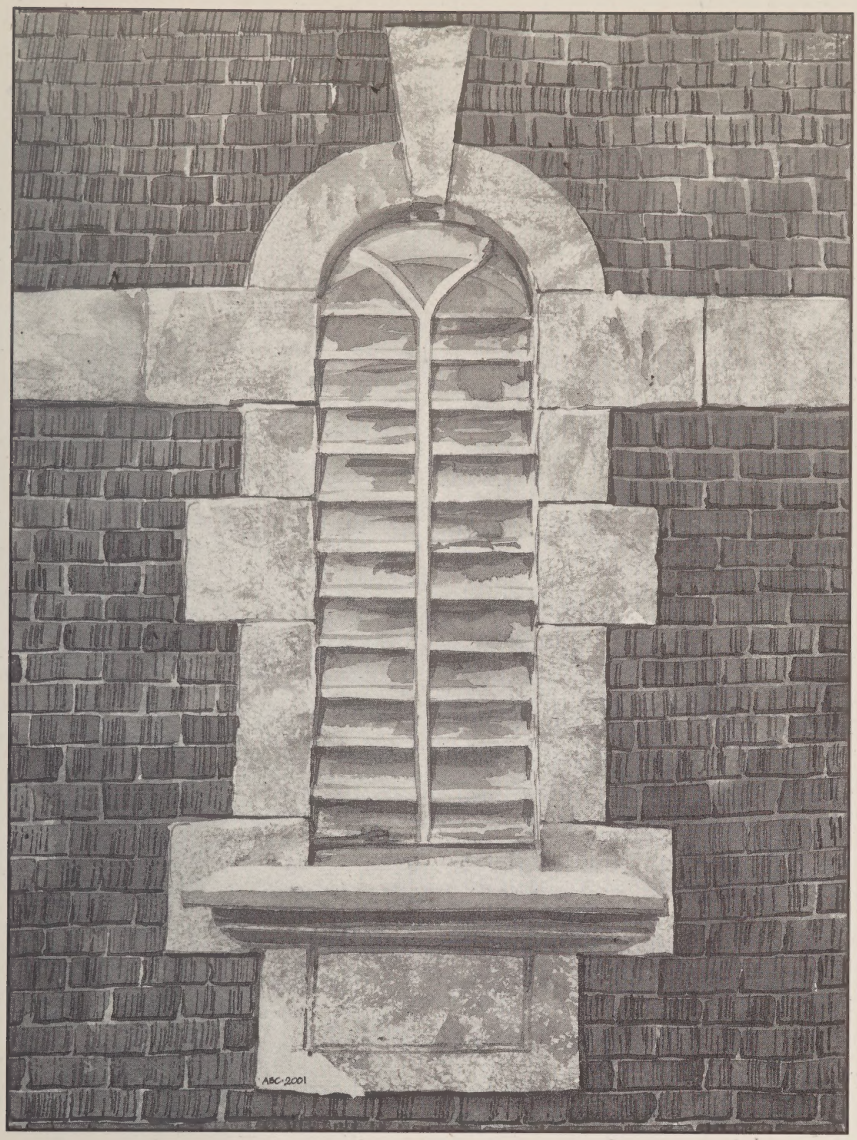
***Victoria Press* continues to include contributions from neighboring community colleges. We thank each contributor, especially Tommy Hays and Fred Chappell.**

Victoria Press Editorial Board members with North Carolina poet laureate Fred Chappell. (L to R: Mary Hay Gwynn, Nancy Dillingham, Lisa Johnson, Fred Chappell, David Holcombe, Lee Sokol, Tom Rash, Alma Fisher, and Celia Miles) Photo by Susan Chappell.



Drawing by Annie Cicale



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This issue is dedicated to Celia Miles, who began the journey.

2001
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Cover watercolor of Ivy Building by Annie Cicale

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

A Hummingbird Stuck in a Spider Web

Michael McFee

What small annunciation is this?: an angel stalled in mid-air, wings spread, struggling against the tacky strands meant for lesser miracles.

An iridescent fortune falls into my palm, quietens, settles there almost weightless. *Is it still alive?* Yes, panting under its shimmery cape, blinking slowly, resting a long sheathed tongue between nectarless fingers.

Little Gabriel spins around in my hands, squeaking, trying to fly again; but the left wing won't work. Can glory be broken? Who can set such bones, make them hum invisible again?

Wait, you say, *look at this*, and start teasing tangled web from its wing, plucking tough sticky silk from bound feathers until, suddenly, the air buzzes and something zips back toward the green heaven it came from, to nestle in a tiny downy cloud held together with spider webs.

Outside Brevard

Michael McFee

we stepped out of our clothes and into the frigid river
on opposite sides of a boulder so broad and tall

I never did see her luminous gooseflesh

though my ears filled with her gasps as she surfaced
from the same dark water that had just erased my body.

Elegy for a Stranger

Michael McFee

Jim Wayne Miller, 1936-1996

Though we came from the same mountain county
whose name gave "bunk"
to every dictionary of the English language,

I never knew you

except through your books and the far-flung tales
of another dazzling thing
you'd said or done at parties, readings, conferences:

I don't know

if you ever hiked the forest trail above Hindman
but I imagined so
as I walked there last summer, when you were sick:

I didn't know

you would die so soon, but as sunlight deepshafted
the steep downslope, lighting
the groundcover running cedar, that evergreen on a fuse,

I knew

that any mountain-born boy would love to be buried
on such a hillside,
under that coverlet stirred by a steady breeze:

I know

the words you left behind, on the page, in the air,
and I like how
they can still stir us, your orphans, to laughter or tears:

and I do know

that *place* is a permanent word shared by natives,
untranslatable yet as real
as a cup of blackest coffee raised to a sleepy driver's lips,

and I certainly know

we both felt our hearts lift every time we drove home
into Buncombe, that place
where we began, the blue hills smoking, watching, waiting.

Emigrants

Michael McFee

Ithaca, New York

Beagles keep baying somewhere out of sight,
my neighbor's hungry hounds tuning up
for their long ride to field trials out of state:

another dream of home, waking me up
though barking continues when I leave bed
and hurry through the cold house out the door,
my bare feet melting hard frost, my bare head
tilting until it finds that music's source:

a vast wedge of Canada geese passing over,
vectoring toward the familiar ponds and lakes
where I come from, unfrozen winter water,

their lofty doglike honking starting to make
me shiver where I stand with open lifted mouth,

ready to answer that calling, to head back south.

Signatures

Michael McFee

1.

The day before he died,
though he could barely grasp the pen
or see the paper I angled under his hand
so his name would legally fill in the blank,

my father struggled to sign the document
that granted me power of attorney,

laboring to execute the signature
he'd spent a lifetime writing
until it was second nature, his name's fingerprint,
his seal, his identifying mark, his standard,
him.

2.

He wrote even more slowly
than I did as a schoolkid learning cursive
when I copied his signature again and again
simply because it was so beautiful,
girlish almost, a model of old-fashioned penmanship
flowing across the page in a graceful tilt—

the W a series of quick looping arcs
landing in a superscript m
held in the air by a single dot beneath,

the H an unbroken combination of strokes
like an intricate antique knot,

the M the inverse of the initial W
beside a c balanced on double vertical lines
leading to the final flourish of a capital F
and the simplest letters of all,
the double e's that meant you were free,

you'd done it, you'd signed the family name.

3.

I'd watched his signature degenerate
on the checks he'd had to sign
in the preceding months, after his heart attack,

from a shaky version of his fluent script,
to a scrawl so drifty
it looked like his name had been violently shaken,
to a wavery horizontal line
with lumps where all the capitals should be.

That penultimate day in the hospital,
he worked a very long time to scratch out his name,

illegible, legal.

4.

My own signature had become
a high-speed fit of dense lower-casey letters,
a decadent *fin de siecle* corruption
of the ideal style tacked above the blackboards
by gradeschool teachers,

tiny arrows and numbers showing us
how to move our pencils in a kind of dance
so we could write like adults,

like the perfect cursive of Wm. H. McFee.

5.

How badly I wanted to take his halting hand
inside my own unsteady one
and help him shape the letters I never forgot,
down to the least arc and loop and flourish,

but I couldn't, I had to be patient
and watch him painstakingly unname himself,
the last rite of writing,

the last mark he would ever make in this world.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

On a Slant

Celia Miles

Josh lived for three months on a slant.

"Dear kids," she wrote, "You'd never believe your mother has to walk sideways just to stand up. My home is hotter than the top side of a sunning blacksnake, not that you've ever seen a blacksnake sunning, not on the sidewalks of Roanoke. Imagine the sun baking, imagine the heat in your father's eyes when he was blazing mad and triple it, and you've got the temperature of my summer place."

Josh, short for Jocelyn. God knows where her addle-headed mama came up with that name. Likely some true story magazine about a bad girl turned good or a good girl turned bad, and Mama would have known about both ends of that equation. Josh let the air whoosh by her as she swung the trailer door back and forth, fanning the inside, stirring the air before she could enter and prop the door open. The screen door, for which she was thankful, had two big rips in it but, with careful tying with some kudzu vines, it kept most of the flying creatures out; those that made it inside died in the heat when she closed up her place for the morning and crept through the fields to work. So she lived with fried insects in the dying heat of the late afternoon.

"There's a spring close by," she wrote to a former neighbor, "cool water's a blessing down here. And it's cool under the big sycamore trees, down under the bank a ways so the two cows don't bother it." They muddied the stream further down, standing in the water hoof-deep so that Josh wondered if they felt its effect at all, flicking their tails at the cousins of the dead flies in her living room, dipping their nostrils and wuffing in the shallows.

Josh stepped on the large rock she'd placed where a step had once been and heaved herself into the room, welcoming its shadows, stifling as they were. She swung her backpack to the floor where it slid toward the downward side of the trailer. Her toes in thin canvas shoes from the Dollar General gripped the floor as she leaned forward. After a few minutes, she could manage the slant pretty well. And she was grateful for it. Who was going to suspect someone was living in a trailer in the middle of a hot, unplanted, former tomato patch in the middle of Sommer County in the off-center of north Georgia?

"Nobody had lived here some time," she wrote her mother. "That's why I got it so cheap." Dirt cheap, no rent at all. The trailer sat empty, hot, rusting, falling forward where foundation blocks had slipped. As far as Josh could tell, nobody claimed the trailer and she didn't want to know who owned the land. Some college graduate had probably inherited the family property and didn't ever intend to live there, maybe rent it out some day. Maybe the white house on the stone foundation two curves down the road was the old homestead. A "Rental property

by RePro" sign stood in the front yard and a Suburban with Florida license plates in the driveway most mornings.

Josh squatted and with her left leg hooked the backpack and pulled it to her, retrieved a plastic bottle of water and took a long drink; it was wet and still cool. She rolled the bottle over her forehead and let the backpack begin its slide back to the base of the window. She stood and wedged the bottle on the counter, behind a loaf of white bread, limp but edible. Her shirt was soaked through, completely wet and she peeled herself out of it, hanging it neatly on a wire hanger which dangled from a cabinet drawer. Her bra followed. She studied it, ratty, yellowed, but a necessary item. She didn't quite dare go to work without it, whether she considered it protection or provocation.

"Mrs. Watson doesn't like me," she wrote to her former boss, "but Mr. Watson's bound to keep me on. He knows a good worker when he sees one." Mrs. Watson's eyes had shrewdly appraised the mature ripeness of her bosom; Josh was sure that was the term she used. And Mrs. Watson also knew she'd be a good worker. Better to have this one working around the place than risk some desperate seventeen-year-old looking for any summer work, more full of problems than strength or sense, not so filled out, but likely more tempting to a man's eye, even Watson's eye, and he'd been known to brush against women now and again, pretending innocence when they moved back, never thinking Mrs. Watson noticed, pulled her lips into a frown, and never offered those women "discounts" or freebies. With a nod, she'd given assent and left the room.

Mr. Watson shrugged and ground out his cigarette on the cement floor. He pushed the W-2 forms toward her.

"I won't be working enough for that," Josh said. "Just enough to get a ticket on to Idaho where my kids stay with my mother." The state of Idaho just slipped out and was apparently what she needed. Who would lie about wanting to get to Idaho?

"It's the regulation," Mr. Watson offered weakly, already thinking, Josh knew, that he could pay even less than minimum wage maybe.

"I don't need much," Josh helped him out. "I'm low maintenance this summer." She'd slept in the slanted trailer two nights and what she said was the truth. Mr. Watson looked at this woman who was looking sideways at the display of honey. He didn't give a goddamn about her kids or her rent. He did need a steady worker through the tourist season.

"Five dollars a hour is about all I can afford," he said. "Can give you maybe twenty-five, thirty hours a week."

Josh ignored the government forms; he was hooked. And so far he hadn't done more than glance at her breasts. "What about some of this stuff?" She indicated the boxes, bins, bushel baskets of produce around them. He'd pulled down a heavy screen attachment to close out customers, it being close to seven o'clock. The open-faced building already smelled of peaches on the edge of rotten, tomatoes softening, cucumbers mushy.

Mr. Watson must have suddenly felt generous. "Take anything we can't sell in the morning," he said. "Save a little work that way."

Josh was glad she'd splurged on the two hotdogs for a dollar at the convenience store up the highway so her stomach wouldn't betray her. "Thanks," she said. "And five is fine, for now. What time in the morning?"

"Before eight, close to seven if you can make it." Mr. Watson didn't see a car, didn't know how she'd get here but that was her business. 'Start by throwing out the rotten stuff, spray the rest, fill up the bins, set out what's been unloaded in the back." He grunted. "Both me and my wife's got bad backs. Need somebody to do the heavy lifting, now J.C.'s graduated and got a scholarship to West Point. West Point, by God. He's my cousin's boy." He pulled a packet from his pocket and offered her a Camel.

"No thanks," Josh said. "Never developed the habit." She didn't say her daddy'd died struggling for breath, with his forbidden cigarettes on the night stand and her mother puffing away and wailing in the doorway. "I can take some of these peaches now," she said. "Peaches you don't get much out in Idaho." She hoped that was true, could tell by Mr. Watson's face that he didn't know and didn't care.

She'd thought what the absence of a car might imply to any employer. Watson's Fruit and Vegtable stand was, in that regard, the perfect spot. A couple of hundred yards down the highway, a seedy one-story motel, The Blue Ridge, sat off on a side road, once the main highway. If she walked that way, anybody would think it was her destination since beyond was only a small dam and then National Forest land. This she knew from the talkative clerk at the convenience store. Once out of sight of Watson's misspelled Fruit and Vegtable stand, she could cut across the field next to a boys' school and then walk the gravel road a mile or so. Rather than approach the trailer directly from the road, however, she slipped down a small incline and around an abandoned Christmas tree farm with its now tall, unkempt trees, alongside the dusty barbed wire fence overgrown with morning glories and blackberry briars and to her trailer slanted in the midst of the joe pye and ironweed. A long walk and hot as hell but it might not be much worse than The Blue Ridge Motel—if only it had running water and a bath room.

"You wouldn't believe how pretty it is here," she wrote to her aunt. "The mountains are in a haze every morning, not smog exactly, a real fog and they just rise up hazy and misty. The flowers are lovely, and the sunsets are orange and red. Not much traffic; you couldn't stand the peacefulness." The only noisy traffic was occasional squealing of tires as teenagers (she imagined) bet their lives rounding each curve, spraying gravel and throwing beer cans into the weeds, and the growling of shifting gears as dump trucks crept along the road, heavy as pregnant sows. One of these days a growling truck was bound to meet a speeding Mustang or a Dodge pickup in a blind curve. It happened apparently all over this part of Georgia, according to talk at the Fruit and Vegtable stand. "'Nother one of Jackson's boys wound up in the hospital last night. How his mama can stand it, I don't know. You'd think after his brother, them other boys would slow down, but,

no. He plowed right through a fence and was throwed out, lucky he didn't have a seatbelt on or he'd a-been killed when the car rolled over. All three of them's been sent to Atlanta with broke bones. The Jackson boy's the worse but he'll live they say."

The trailer, slanted like a tipsy box, its aluminum reinforcing edges gleaming in the moonlight, had looked to Josh like a refuge of the first order. She'd literally crawled to it on her hands and knees, dragging her backpack. One side of her face would show a bruise and her shoulder hurt.

"An acquaintance told me about this area," she wrote to a friend, "and was good enough to give me a ride." The trucker had left the main highway, his brooding face bulldoggish, after she'd refused to scoot closer to him, refused his roaming hand. She'd sensed danger when he yanked the semi-cab off onto the gravel road and asked bluntly, "What did ya think I picked you up for? Solitaire?" When he'd braked on a bad curve, she'd scrambled to open the door. The bruises were the result of his grabbing and her tumbling to the kudzu-covered ground. She'd rolled down the bank and was out of sight before he could stop the truck. He got out and stood looking, cursed a few times, turned to pee into the darkness and then slammed the door. Josh stayed out of sight until she heard the truck stop further on, turn around, and head back toward the highway. The trailer door opened easily and she'd slept on a slant as naturally as the cows flicked flies.

Josh stretched out on the shag carpet, sending little puffs of dust upward. The grime of long years bit into her back but stretching felt good; she closed her eyes and let trickles of sweat soak into the waistband of her jeans. Considering she'd worn those jeans five days and walked and worked and sweated in them, they were amazingly clean. At every chance, she sponged off stains or smudges in the tiny toilet tucked behind the fruit stand. On payday she could surely get a ride down to Clayton and find a laundromat and another pair of pants at the Dollar General or a consignment shop. For long moments she kept her eyes closed until her head swirled away memory and she wasn't sure whether she stood or lay or even existed.

"I am settling in very well here, like my job although it's more physical than when I worked at Blakemore," she wrote to former colleagues. "I make enough to keep me in all the things I need and there's no real problems." She simply ignored the blisters on her feet caused by walking at least three miles in three-dollar shoes. She stopped by the convenience store's restroom to scrub all over and to wash her extra shirt which she then tucked into a plastic bag. She ate bananas, peaches, tomatoes, carrots, celery, cabbage, apples, pears—anything which didn't require cooking—and sandwiches made with peanut butter in the morning before it almost melted to oil. Occasionally a customer at the stand would say, "I'm going up to Joe's. Want me to bring you a cup of coffee on my way back?" She stayed far enough away from Mr. Watson so that his wife finally turned her back to them without wondering or peeping, and she never complained about the muck around back, the slippery backroom floor where she sorted, tossed, sprayed, unbagged and unboxed the fruits and vegetables. She'd thought

the produce would be locally grown and some was, but most was trucked in and unloaded at the back of the building, perhaps to preserve the illusion of homegrown even for the local customers.

If anybody cared about the "new woman working at Watsons," they did not seem particularly interested. It might have been different if she'd been younger but the graying streaks in her hair and her thickening hips meant the young neighborhood studs looked once but not twice. Her face was neither plump nor lean, her nose neither big nor stubby cute. A loose shirt obscured both her breasts and her hips. One boy had eyed her and described her shape in gestures to his buddies in the car; Mrs. Watson smiled to hear one of them mutter, "Might as well screw your aunt."

Josh's one particularity was the inability to look anyone directly in the eye. She looked to the side, to the other side, slightly to the left or right of ears . . . anywhere but directly at the person addressing her. Josh's askew glances Mrs. Watson noticed only on the second day of her work and she tried by increasing the volume of her voice and by placing her hands on her hips to steer Josh's eyes directly to hers. It didn't work.

The snake lay across the barely distinguishable path she'd made to the trailer. In the hot sunlight, flecks of brownish gold seemed to fly into the air, even as Josh stopped dead still and waited, her arms at her side, one holding her backpack, the other a brown paper bag with a cold drink and pimento cheese sandwich. She knew it wasn't a blacksnake; its pinkish body had brown bands running across it, with small dark splotches in between. Her chest was an instant dam, too thin to contain the pounding flood. Surely the thumping harshness would propel the snake along. She could see perhaps three feet before its tail diminished in the weeds. It was flattened out, its body not glistening but matte-like, with a wrinkle where it covered a small stick on the ground. A small white butterfly fluttered around the Queen Ann's Lace close to Josh's elbow; a cowbell sounded down by the stream, then a muted siren on the highway. Sweat dripped into her eyes but she couldn't lift her arms to wipe it away—paralyzed, as before. In the salty blur the snake expanded fuzzily. Oh, God, Josh thought, I can't move. She didn't think she could step at all. To her left was its head; to step right where its tail disappeared into the high dusty weeds might be to encounter its mate. Josh stood, as before. Dampened by the cold bottle, the paper bag broke and the liter of Pepsi thumped at her feet. She jumped, and the snake slithered away faster than she wanted to believe possible, yet in slow motion before her sweaty eyes.

Josh picked up the Pepsi and hugged it to her side, its coolness assuring her of something, that she was alive, that an accident of picking up a used paper bag rather than plastic that day had broken the spell, that the snake was as vulnerable as she . . . something.

Of course, if the snake, or any snake, had wanted the shelter, the security of the slanted trailer, it could have availed itself of dozens, hundreds of

opportunities to enter, as Josh saw cracks at doors, windows, floors. She had to believe no snake wanted where she lived.

"My place is lovely," she wrote to a friend, "but too isolated to be a desirable location for tourists at any rate. I have peace and quiet galore." As she placed her backpack under her head later in the evening, soon after darkness enveloped the valley, she shuddered violently once, then closed her eyes, hoping for sleep. It came as always to her exhausted body and, while other nights she had dreams of another life, this night her dreams slithered away, illusive as truth.

Josh awoke with an intense awareness of where she was, the light filtering through the dust motes, her white feet straight before her, her damp hair smelling slightly dank. The snake she was certain would make another appearance. For the next few days, she went about her routine as if she waited for something. Mr. Watson noticed and maneuvered his body closer, not touching. "Expecting a letter or something? Somebody coming to visit?" he asked.

She saw it, surely the same snake, by the stream, again stretched out, in no hurry, secure and lazing in the shadows. Had she not been alert, vigilant, she'd have missed it. It occupied a brownish log, had appropriated the very place Josh had thought to sit and soak her feet in the sluggish water. Its tongue flicked in and out as she watched. Intensely focused on the creature, she ran her own tongue over her dry lips. She'd looked up *snakes* in a paperback in the convenience store, and its markings told her copperhead. Her childhood knowledge told her poisonous; the book said "low toxicity." This time she carried no Pepsi to warn her and no stick to protect her, yet she stood, refusing to retreat. Not that she was sure she'd sit on the log if the snake did take itself off, but neither was she going to back up. Not yet, anyway. She looked down on the snake, sweating even while goose pimples prickled her arms. She stood so long that the cows on the other side of the stream went back to munching and then again raised their inquisitive heads to check on her presence. When she stood still, they again resumed their chewing. Josh's eyes watched the snake's triangular head and long length, she and it poised for retreat or attack. The goose pimples calmed down on her arms and she became aware of a sharp stone biting into the toughened sole of her right foot. When the snake raised its head slightly, Josh's eyes skewed away, and it gathered itself up, and took its leave with only a couple of final flicks. It veered not toward her but away, going home.

A softness came over Josh and she sank to the ground gracefully, assuming almost a true yoga position. Well, she thought, well . . . . After a few seconds she glanced at the watching cows and giggled. "Silly cows," she said aloud. Then she slid her feet into the water, wincing at the ache it provided her raw blisters. Walking toward the trailer, she kept a close watch about her but she didn't expect to see the snake again. Not that day.

No one can truly remain unknown, even in rural north Georgia, and before the end of the summer a few people were aware of Josh's living quarters. Curious, Mr. Watson followed her one day and saw that The Blue Ridge was not her

destination, saw her continue. And in the way of such places, piece by piece some people put together the puzzle. Mr. Watson didn't tell his wife, but one evening she referred to Josh as "burning up in that trailer on Aiken's property." Josh continued in ignorance of their knowledge, becoming friendly with local customers, joking with Sue at the convenience store, hitching a ride with Jim or Zack into town, returning to her metal box each evening.

"Living here is a challenge," she wrote to her former pastor, "I am trying to face . . ." She decided to delay writing to the minister. She would wait.

It was mid-August when the snake reappeared. She'd been watching the ground, been watching logs and big rocks at the stream and on her route home. She didn't expect to see it almost at eye level. And she uttered a little "Yikes!" under her breath. It curled atop a fence post at the outer limits of the Christmas tree farm, actually a post with a kind of platform on it, perhaps where the owner had once placed a martin or bluebird house. Josh stopped. She slipped the backpack from her shoulder to the ground. Waves of cold replaced waves of warmth on her arms, through her body. She steeled herself and stepped forward. She was maybe five feet from the creature. Everything in her wanted to step back, to stumble sideways, to leave it alone, to ignore what she saw. Instead she took another step toward it. One swift forward movement could bury its fangs in her bare arm, in her cheek, or neck. Its head pulled back on itself; aware, very aware, it watched her and flicked its tongue. She stood statue still. Took another step forward. She knew herself to be now at the most vulnerable posture. She had to stoop slightly to be eye level with the snake. Only three feet or so separated them. Josh raised her eyes, gray-blue, the gray-blue of early morning fog. With the inevitability of a rising fog and the imperceptibility of blanketed sunrise she brought her eyes directly level with those of the snake. They gazed at each other. Josh hoped her stone legs would not crumble, that she would not crash to the earth, not startle with any sudden movement. It was not now a question of retreat, not for Josh at any rate. The snake did not move, did not continue its flicking tongue action. She stared into those unblinking vertical pupils, memorizing her fear so it would always be a part of her, called forth by circumstance but not controlling. Josh took a step back carefully, soundlessly, then another step, all the while her eyes threaded straight with the snake's. When her foot snapped a twig, the copperhead shivered its body, uncoiled itself easily, descended the fencepost, found its way into the kudzu vines behind it.

"Dear Mr. Trent," she wrote later that night, "I will be returning to Roanoke in a few weeks when I finish my work here. I will testify against my husband. I will tell what I saw that day at the playground. I can face him and the town." She extracted a slip of paper with the district attorney's address and copied it on the envelope. This letter she mailed.

"Looked straight at me," Mrs. Watson reported to her husband that next evening.

"Yep, me too," he replied. "And she's leaving at the end of the month."

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Dreamscape

Swimming in silver
I rise
my life
a skin I have shed

Eyes glittering
graceful as a snake
I stir my starry skies
and breath like Eve

onto my lover's bed

End Game

Together they stay
intertwined like winding-sheets
seeking succor
sucking substance
growing into one another
like parasites
failing to see
the darkness coming

Southern

Kudzu-easy evening—

pretty-by-nights
twinkle in the twilight

Blue moon rises
hunkering down
scratching the sky

moving over mountains
like music
to midnight

gramophone playing
a sweet lullaby

Full Moon at Midnight

Night's tall gypsy
travels the sky

his great eye glowing
tacking his wares
on every wall

a confidence man
in camouflage
fishing for my soul

The Speed of Grace

Nancy Dillingham

"Thou didst put me together in my mother's womb.
I am fearfully and wonderfully made..."
Psalm 139

Nine days weary and worn
choleric and childbirth-ridden
graceless and ashamed

she has lain
against the counterpane
watching her husband

moving like music
through the air
braiding and re-braiding her hair

It is an image she cannot bear...

Fever raging she rises
finds her husband's straight-edged razor
lifts its ivory handle to her head

Shed of frame and shorn
blood like tears in her eyes
salty and warm

she is begirded and reborn

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Whiskey Ballet

The other man
bandy-legged
shorter than my father
who stands ramrod straight—

two silhouettes
breathing like engines
in the cold November night

dancing in the dark
distilling spirits
filling jars

while unobserved
a distance away
a child starts
swayed with pain

heart-scarred
forever changed
spilling sweetness
to the stars

Among the Myths

"And ain't I a woman?"
Sojourner Truth

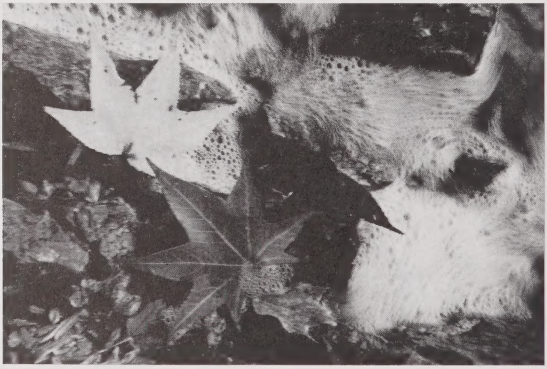
Among the myths
that muzzle us
muffle us
mute the truth

we founder
and forage
for a grounding
a sounding

a respite
from the messages
that hound us
confound us

that have bound us
to a safer place
where we wait
for any heart

that has not hardened
that will not refute



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Physalia

Gerald A. Metz

The first, I thought, was just a plastic sack:
some kind of fuchsia flotsam off the bow,
but when the next came by I changed my tack
and sailed as close as prudence would allow
and touched the quivering splendor of its flesh
and saw, to my amazement and chagrin,
the dangling tentacles below enmesh
dead fish drawn to its glory as I'd been.

Love, like a man-of-war, compels the eye,
the hand, and then its hidden underside
impales its prey and sails serenely by
and leaves a corpse to drift out with the tide.
We die within, and yet we're pleased to know
love's darts go deep but leave no scars that show.

Nocturne

Gerald A. Metz

Persistent ghost! My eyes have washed you from
My world repeatedly but, helpless, watch
Your sure return. I've tried with well-aged Scotch
To exorcize your memory: you come,
Unchanged, to haunt again. Tears won't expel
You nor will alcohol. There's no evading
You in dreams: lids closed, I see the fading
Image of that face I knew so well.

I made myself believe you'd died. I walled
Your memory away. "Remake your life,"
I said. "She's his. She's someone else's wife."
I feared my fantasy was true, and called,
And heard your voice, and know that you're not dead.
Tonight the restless spirit's mine instead.

Writing *Life*

Gabrielle M. Thompson

Each person has a unique story to tell. The life you have lived and how you have perceived it flavor the composition as does the medium you embrace for expression—poetry, short story, autobiography, essay, creative nonfiction, or novel. I began keeping journals thirty years ago as a means of understanding myself. I continue to write down important occurrences in everyday life, using the practice as a method of working through anger and disappointments and documenting who I am and how I grow. Writing is a clear path to unlocking my inner-knowing, as well as a release. When I write, I sound my deepest emotions to describe or relate what I want to say.

For fourteen years, I chartered in the Caribbean. I have always been an avid reader, yet books were hard to find and expensive to buy. Novels were my passion, and Michener, Wouk, and Uris were favorite authors because they filled their works with a sense of having lived in the place, of having been a part of the story. However, I wasn't picky. I read every single book left behind by charter guests—romance, science fiction, occult, gothic or the occasional best seller—which helped establish a background of knowledge of writing styles and genres. In *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, Stephen King states what I've always known intuitively:

> If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around those two things that I'm aware of, no shortcuts . . . . Reading is the creative center of a writer's life. I take a book with me everywhere I go, and find there are all sorts of opportunities to dip in. The trick is to teach yourself to read in small sips as well as in long swallows. Waiting rooms were made for books—of course! But so are theater lobbies before the show, long and boring checkout lines, and everyone's favorite, the john. You can even read while you're driving, thanks to the audiobook revolution . . . . Reading at meals is considered rude in polite society, but if you expect to succeed as a writer, rudeness should be the second-to-least of your concerns. The least of all should be polite society and what it expects. If you intend to write as truthfully as you can, your days as a member of polite society are numbered, anyway.

I began writing during my chartering career, wanting to share my knowledge about the vacation, the Virgin Islands, and their peoples. I submitted

articles to local newspapers and sailing magazines and was thrilled when I saw my name in print.

My first novel began in a nightmare, waking me from a sound sleep—terrified, and gasping for breath. I left the bed, needing to commit it to paper as well as being afraid to go back to sleep and finding myself back in the clutches of the nightmare. As I wrote, the dream took on a life of its own, becoming a story. In the following days, I would compose four to eight pages at my word processor from three to six in the morning before my family arose for school and work. I was energized and happy, though averaging only five hours of sleep a night. The excitement of the creativity kept me going. In *On Writing*, King says that he never plots; he believes stories make themselves, and the writer is the medium of growth. I didn't work from an outline, nor did I know the direction the manuscript would take. At the end of each sitting, I would scratch a few sentences on a scrap sheet of paper. During the day I wondered how it would develop. The following morning my eyes would open at three (I never needed an alarm during this artistic outpouring) and, after a short meditation at my writing desk, the words and pages would flow from a pool of creativity within. I have recently read *Writing in Flow: Keys to Enhanced Creativity*, by Susan K. Perry, who interviewed various authors regarding how they tapped this pool. (All quotes to follow other than Stephen King are from this source.) She describes flow as a challenging activity that has clear goals which you are capable of and on which you are focused to the point of losing awareness of yourself and time. The task becomes self-rewarding. She continues: "Thus, flow, absorption, intense focus and a mood of persistent fascination with an activity are all varied forms of altered consciousness. A few writers learn to use self-hypnosis to put themselves into what may be an actual hypnotic state to gain greater control over their creative output." For me, the act of meditation was my psychological connection, just as I am able go to sleep the second my head hits the pillow—telling myself that is what I'm there for—much to the irritation of my husband! I found the manifestation of my first novel to be a magical experience. When it was complete, I realized how much of it was about me. The heroine's thoughts, dreams, and aspirations were mine. Her desire to be something better than she was—to be connected with God—mirrored my own need. In developing her soul, I had found my own.

When I moved back to the United States, I went to work in a library—a bonanza of books for an addicted reader. Even more exciting, I discovered a realm of how-to books on the craft of writing that I never knew existed.

I began composing essays about the mountains and the seasons I had never before experienced, having been a Californian before my years in the tropics. Overwhelmed by the beauty of Western North Carolina, I wrote creative nonfiction with spiritual overtones. Letty Cottin Pogrebin's words echo how I felt in my new home: "Travel is the ultimate time extender. In a strange, new country, the world slows down because we are paying attention, trying to figure things out. Exotic locales elicit the same sharp focus and intense concentration as

did all of life when we first encountered it." My writing changed as *need* forced dedication, and I accessed a fountain of words. Description of what I saw and the effect it had upon me bubbled to the surface of my awareness. In expressing the beauty of nature I experienced a soul-felt connection. It was a pathway to God. My consciousness expanded to another dimension where thought and feeling became one. At this level, time and the real world ceased to exist. It is akin to a state of grace. Faye Moskowitz shares that sensation: "Words come easily from that reservoir I sometimes believe I have, but never quite know how to tap. This is when time ceases to exist, when all my senses are focused on writing; this is the closest I will ever come to an out-of-body experience, and in the end, it is the possibility of re-creating these moments that keeps me going as a writer."

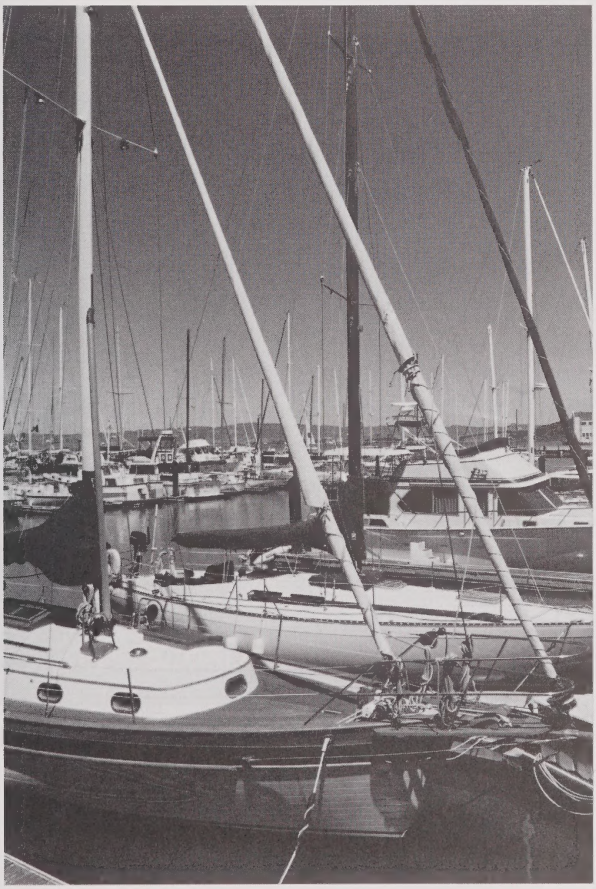
When I began my second novel, I started as before—characters telling their story. However, with this book I wrote 3x5 cards of scenes and plot ideas I wanted to incorporate, and 6x8 cards establishing the characters' physical descriptions and the backgrounds that shaped their lives. I wrote the mornings of my late day at work and took vacation days. On these days, I would sit for twelve to fourteen hours straight, getting as much continuous writing accomplished as I could. Any spare moments were spent reading about the craft of novel writing, which helped me understand stasis, quest, critical choice, pacing, climax, reversal and resolution. The process was never difficult, and I had more sense of control over where the second novel was going. In Perry's book, Merrill Joan Gerber sums up how I felt: "It's a kind of a grace that comes after long preparation, after turning to the subject with a willingness to go there and also after a kind of maturity settles onto the material you've been mulling about. It's a state much to be desired, like love, but can't be willed into being."

It took me ten years to start a book about the Caribbean, and eighteen months to finish. This second book, *Adventures in Paradise*, is set in the multicultural society of St. Thomas in the early Seventies—a place and time where fantasy and reality blended in an exciting life unimagined by most people. It was a story I needed to share and, although fiction, is based in real life. Each of the main characters is a composite of at least three people I knew. The heat of the Caribbean is felt through the heart of shipbuilder Luke Nordstrom as he sails his fifty-foot traditional schooner, *Twilight,* to the Virgin Islands, determined to make a living as a charter boat captain. Accompanied by his Navajo first mate, Jonas Whitehawk, he searches for tropical adventure. Each one finds the woman of his dreams on the island that dances to a reggae beat. My story focuses on their strengths and foibles, trying always to be honest in portraying their attitudes and beliefs. As King says:

> The point is to let each character speak freely, without regard to what the Legion of Decency of the Christian Ladies' Reading Circle may approve of. To do otherwise would be cowardly as well as dishonest, and believe me, writing fiction in America as

> we enter the twenty-first century is no job for intellectual cowards. There are lots of would-be censors out here, and although they may have different agendas, they all want basically the same thing: for you to see the world they see . . . or to at least shut up about what you *do* see that's different.

In writing *Adventures in Paradise* I've told a story uniquely my own. It is a course I charted that had never been sailed before. It is how I am able to share myself with my world, by writing life as I have lived it, expressed through fiction. Barbara Kingsolver says it quite well: "I've always had this sort of undercurrent of terror flowing through me when I think about time passing. When I look at a calendar I feel this profound urge not to stop time, but to stick pins in every inch of the way to make sure that it's attached to me, to make sure that I have passed through and will know that I've passed through that passage of time when it's over, and that it won't have just vanished. And writing is the way I do that."



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Family Reunion

Will Hooper

Who was that?
Everyone was waving at the guy
in that Duke Power truck—
"That's Bill Koone—
the man who lost his 34-year-old daughter last year."
No reason, no rhyme, no alcohol—
seat belt intact—just random chance.

Beautiful clouds and soft rain
on the trees and mountains,
ALL seen from Grandma's porch!
I turn to five-year-old Cody next to me
in the swing and say,
"Aren't the clouds pretty all curly and gray?"

We saw Jack Davis's daughter Sue walking down the road—
Sue says Jack can't remember how to feed himself
or find his way home.

I see Jack in my mind 30 years ago,
a fat disheveled man with a calm sense of humor,
surveying a pack of accepted strays with a smile and a
"damn dogs costin' me a fortune in Purina."

Beautiful flowers in Aunt Leona's garden
in the backyard I ran in when I was 3—

I showed my cousin's kids Cody and Jeffrey
the house I lived in when I was their age—

"Yeah, this road used to be dirt and this hill was higher and the grass was taller.
It's nice to grow up in the country, the grass and sky and mountains so close."

The rain smells beautiful on Grandma's porch,
swinging and eating ice cream with the generations,
watching the field of tall grass across the road
flow in the wind like brushed hair.
The cows drift toward a nest of trees in the slow rain.

In the front yard Uncle Stanley shows off
his rebuilding of Uncle Roger's old truck.
We all stare and feast upon sweet memory, as for a moment
the past is cast in a collection of perfectly formed shapes and curves—

There is something bigger here, sweeping over us and the mountains with the rain.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Perspective

Words & Music by Will Hooper
(Played moderately in drop-D tuning and Travis-style)

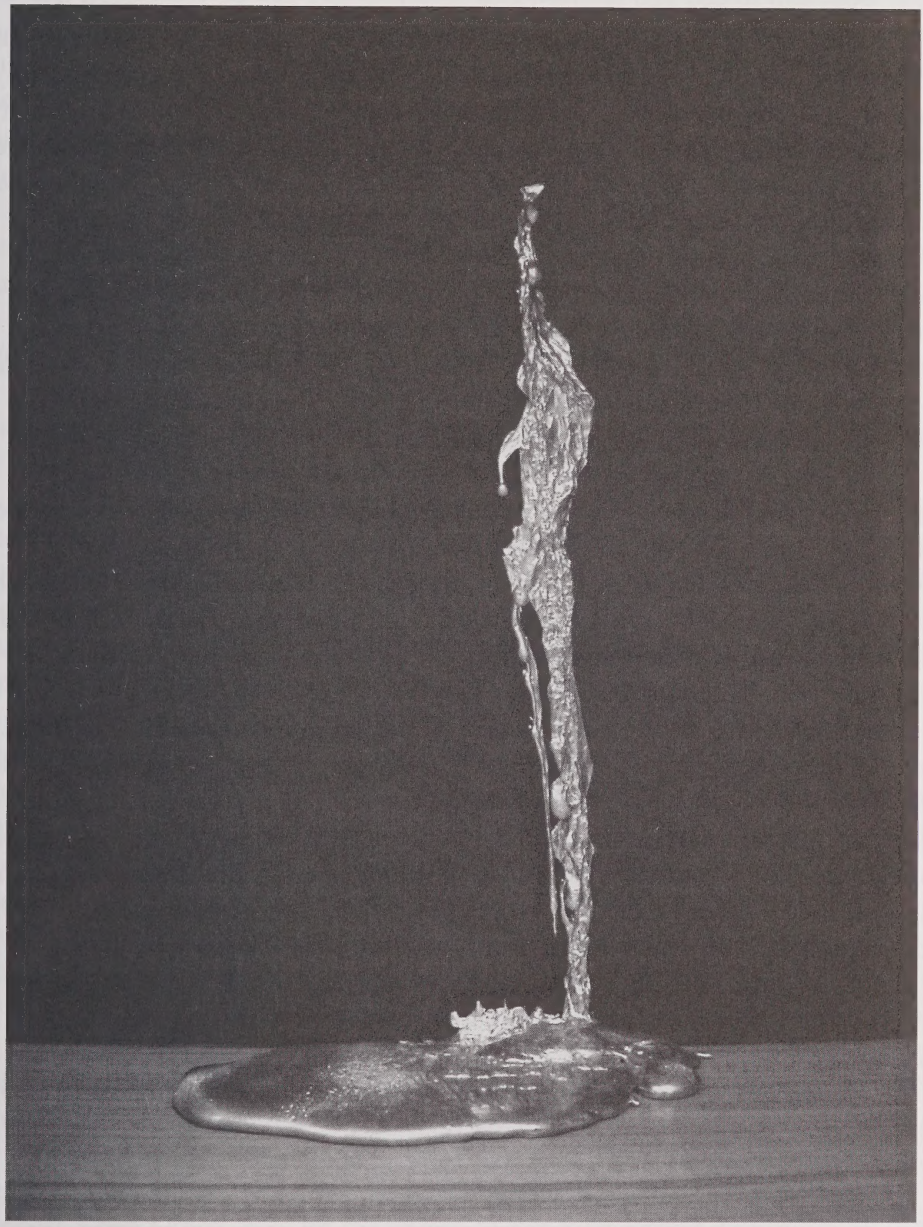
If I could look inside myself
see the man that I am
would I close my eyes in shame
would I call him a friend
So many faces I have known
so many masks I've worn
so many dreams that I have sown
so many seams that I've torn

D/Dsus2/D/Dsus4/D

If I could look in a crystal ball
many heartbeats away
would I know myself at all
what would be left to say
so many sunsets come and gone
so many fallen leaves
would there still be dreams unborn
would I finally be free

If I could look through the eyes of God
and watch the Cosmos expand
would I count each sparrow's fall
what would I think of man
so many stars and planets formed
such a void to know
would there still be worlds unborn
and many seeds to sow

Refrain:
Stand alone on a winter night
watch the northern cross
Cygnus makes his soaring flight
without gain without loss
Look and see his serenity
as he flies from dusk to dawn
His light is still in your eyes
in the morning when he is gone



Sculpture and Photograph by Hank Jackson

An Appalachian Marriage Tale

Diana La Spada

Patty and Craig Brown have been married fifteen years now. She's about ten years older than he is; she's forty-nine. The Browns and I have become pretty close over the last six years since I became a neighbor. This might seem peculiar to some, me being a northern big-city gal and Patty and Craig having roots in the mountains that reach down to the foothills. Nonetheless, the Browns have looked after me from the first, often bringing me garden clippings and good square vegetarian meals prepared mostly by the wife but sometimes by the husband. Many a time I've come home from work exhausted, willing to skip dinner, and there on my kitchen counter rests a paper plate partitioned into Patty's famous sautéed cabbage, diced baked potatoes and onions, eight-hour cooked beans and, always, a cooled-down hunk of cornbread. I think they're afraid that I might die of malnutrition and then they'll have some explaining to do.

Everything about Patty is circular, and she has gotten rounder over the years. Her ample visage recalls one of those puff-cheeked, blowing cloud pictures from an old, illustrated, nursery rhyme book. Her hair stays short, silver, and permed; she doesn't like to mess with it. Craig is tall, lean and good looking, and always has a soda bottle on hand that he can spit into. She's a firecracker. He's a quiet man. He's always sunburnt from his job as a landfill engineer. She's all pinky white like mountain laurel. You can tell they love each other.

That's not to say their marriage is smooth as her homemade cream corn. They've always had a tug-of-war going on: Patty on one end pulling for life and love, his family on the other pulling because they don't know how to let go. I figure four or five on one side and Patty on the other is probably a fair distribution of determination. She says they never accepted her from the beginning and that's how it all got to this point: an icy war with bloody border skirmishes every now and then. It wasn't always this bad. Patty used to try but she got worn down by the slights over the years. She wishes Craig would stand up to them for her. But he won't, and I expect it's because the rope around his waist is too tight in both directions.

One recent afternoon, I answered my ringing telephone and heard a faint, timid female voice on the other end.

"Are you busy?" Patty asked.

"I'll be going to work in a while," I answered.

"Can I come over for a few minutes?"

"Sure."

Her face had turned alabaster, all the pink in it having gathered around the sockets. We sat on my sofa at either end. I was stumbling around some trite opening remarks for a minute or two when she got to the point.

"Big John had two heart attacks last night and he's in the hospital right now dyin'." She was speaking of Craig's granddaddy. He was eighty-four and the only one of her husband's relatives Patty had ever felt an occasional speck of warmth from. Still, he was clan patriarch and working one end of that rope.

"Craig's over there with Edith and Kaye and they decided to take Big John off his blood pressure medicine and let him go. You know Big John was such a strapping big man and now he's down to about your weight, down to about a hundred pounds. But Craig wouldn't let them take away his respirator cause he didn't want Big John to suffocate none."

I listened, knowing immediately the cause of Patty's anguish. Edith, Craig's granny, and Kay, his momma, would not want to be sharing this emotional family moment with her, the enemy. She continued.

"He just called me from a pay phone at the hospital and he is tryin' to figure out all the paperwork they're throwin' at 'im cause Edith and Kaye can't do it. He's never done anything like this before and Oh!," she bellowed, "he's a wailin' an' I can't be there for 'im!" And finally the levee gave way and a flood of fresh tears gushed from her denim-blue eyes.

Before I could reach over and throw my arms around her heaving shoulders, his old navy pickup swung into their gravel driveway and she jumped up crying, "There he is . . . I've got to go to 'im!" She was out the door and across the street like a mother running to rescue her child from an oncoming train. They froze a moment in a grief-stricken embrace, and I could hear her muffled sobbing against his cotton shirt. Presently they went inside.

The next day, sparked with wonder, she told me how she'd never seen Craig take command like he had in the last twenty-four hours, making all sorts of arrangements and such. "Maybe this is a turning point," she said. "Maybe things are gonna be different now. Maybe my prayers have finally been answered." She said that when she told her husband that it was okay if she didn't attend the funeral, he'd stopped what he was doing and said, "Hush. You're my wife, and you'll stand right by my side when the time comes. Besides, I know that, no matter what, you and Big John had a love for each other and it's right for you to be there with me."

Later on Patty told me that just a couple of hours before he passed, Big John had asked for his Patty-blanket, a hand sewn gift she'd made for him years earlier. Vindication swept across her brow.

For what all she has and hasn't got, my neighbor Patty Brown is the most generous person I've ever met. The rejection of her generosity is what cuts deepest. I don't know how far the ripples of Big John's death will circle out, but something has already changed over at the house on the other side of the road. I've heard it in Craig's voice since. One thing I do know: a powerful pair of hands just let go of that frayed old rope, and nothing under the Browns' roof will ever be quite the same again.

Baseball, of Thee We Sing

Diana La Spada

In many of the cooler American states, there are two sure harbingers of oncoming spring: the robin redbreast has returned to nest, and major league baseball has begun batting practice. For me and many others, news of the latter completely stifles bad news about last blasts of winter. It makes just about anything bearable. T-shirted fans in open-aired stadiums under cerulean skies paint a picture that chases the mental grinches away. Dreams of long days, warm nights, and the boys of summer are the winter elixir of the baseball fan.

In a world of bonecrunching, headslamming competition, baseball is a nonviolent sport. Tempers may fly like high poppers on occasion and accidents can occur, but the very structure of the game renders aggression injury almost nonexistent. And it's the only game where, technically speaking, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole, where the individual is given so much time, so much space, and so much opportunity to contribute. Basketball and football may boast of their occasional little guy, but in baseball no particular body type dominates. A man can be short, lean, squat, tall, massive, bow-legged or just plain fat. Or he can be older, like Houston Astros pitcher, Nolan Ryan, who retired in his forties. If a fella can get the job done, he can play ball. Whether baseman, outfielder, batter, catcher or closer, each player reigns in his own territory; yet their efforts combine to produce a unified human machine.

Like the diamond it is played upon, baseball has many facets. It is dance. It's Gene Kelly in all his muscular grace, fingersnapping and threestepping his way around the bases. It's winged Nijinsky, grande jetéeing into the stands to foul out a batter. There's rhythm in the triple play, the grand slam, and even in the wind-up. Choreography abounds in baseball because there is room for it.

Baseball's also a game of wits. While managers theorize and strategize, shuttling their men like knights and pawns on a chessboard, fitting the right man into the right position for just the right play depending upon the opposing team's stats, pitchers and batters are engaged in their own mental duel. Here, the television camera rewards the baseball fan with reels of electrifying close ups as it zooms in to reveal impulse, thought, state of mind. Boston's Roger Clemens was spellbinding as he zeroed in on '86 Mets' batters like a hawk on sighted prey. Atlanta's Javi Lopez's eyelashes quickly brushed his right cheekbone as he copped a stolen glance back and down at a catcher's signal to a pitcher in '97 while Lopez was up at bat. It is the intrinsic psychological stillness of this game, unlike any other professional team sport I can think of, that serves up these memorable gems.

The language of baseball has an appeal of its own. *Sinker, slider, screwball, change-up, bunt, homer, sacrifice fly, batting a thousand,* and *pinch hitter* are just a sampling of the colorful vernacular baseball has donated to the native tongue. Sadly, the phrase "three strikes and you're out" has become so

bastardized it will probably mean something completely unsporting to the next generation of American youth.

The national pastime is America's firstborn sportschild. It may have had English antecedents but so did most of the colonials. Organized in the late 1850's, it had been staged in cow pastures and empty urban lots for some time before that. That kind of time not only gives a game a history; it gives it a mystique. For over a hundred and thirty years, older generations have been waxing nostalgic about the good old golden days of baseball. In this psychic way, baseball's whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It has evolved into American myth; it has become one with the American Dream, an idealized metaphor for life.

Who are these men in helmets and those funny-looking jersey suits? They are the sons of bricklayers, fishermen, and sharecroppers. They are everyman. Where do they come from? They come from Westfield, Alabama, and Spavinaw, Oklahoma, and Wahoo, Nebraska. They come from everywhere. Their's is the naked achievement of daily individual hard work, yet there is the sense of not just fraternity, but family. After all, the game begins and ends at home plate.

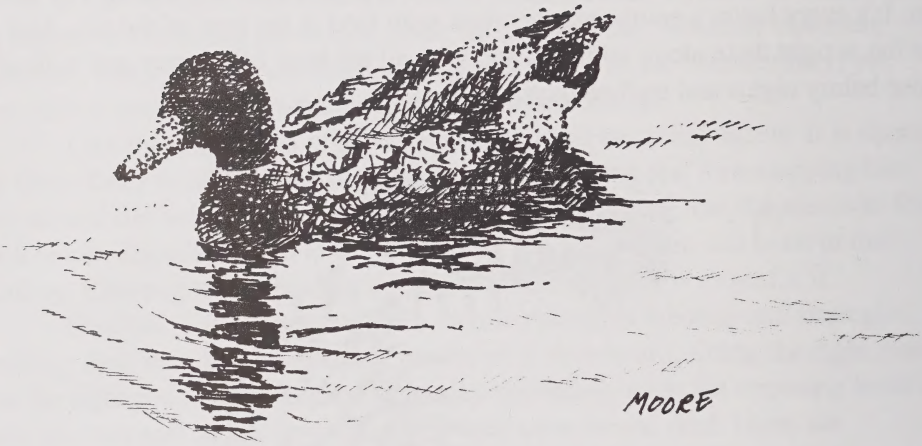
Finally, there is that place in the sun: that glorious, ephemeral interlude when the crack of the wood sends a small white leather sphere hurtling far, far and away into the firmament like Elijah disappearing in his chariot. Time stops . . . and there is silence in the heavens for about the space of half a moment. The home run. It's every batter's apotheosis, his walk with God in the cool of the day. And the fan is right there along with him and with all the boys of summer and with all those balmy nights and endless days.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Duck Shade

Kenet Adamson

Mallards perch
Tree-like shapes
Beaverdam Lake
Fall Sunday dawn.
Tree shade shapes
Shape and shade the drake.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Daddy

Robin Mallernee

The last words my father spoke were, "Let's get this over with." Yesterday, I was remembering my father speak these words and I could just see him sitting in his recliner twisting his right eyebrow worrying over some problem. I wonder when he began to think of his life as something to "get over with."

I know he had a hard life—maybe it started when my mother died so young leaving him with five children, the youngest a newborn. I also think maybe he was in pain for a long time before his death and maybe he gritted his teeth to just get through the days.

I have read inspirational books that suggest we continue to learn from our loved ones even after their death and that is truly a comfort. I was chewing on my cheek and pondering: were these last words a lesson to remember to enjoy life while we have it? Or maybe just a lesson in how to surrender to the dying process once you are there.

Thinking back, his humor on the telephone made all us kids want to call home often, but his disappointment when we shared the details of our lives made us sorry we tried and we would make vows never to call again. But each new life change would tempt us . . . maybe Dad will be proud of me . . . and we would call again.

Visits home would be lots of sitting in the living room, waiting for that opportunity to "talk," hoping something I would say could lure him out of that TV world. Sometimes I would confess to some challenging behavior just to draw an argument.

Sometimes when I was in real trouble I would sit trying to gauge the atmosphere, gathering courage to ask for help. And he always helped me. Many times, as I was bending over his chair to kiss him good-bye, he would slip a fifty-dollar bill into my hand with his hand that felt so strange. He had these tendons that had shrunk and his hand was drawn up and you would feel those hard things.

Still, the last five or six years of Daddy's life were sweet; we healed all our old disagreements. His charm returned and he accepted me and I forgave him.

A few weeks ago in church we were having the group prayer where people usually hold hands and I reached out to this lady sitting beside me and she withdrew her hand. I suddenly felt so rejected and then, with my eyes closed and saying the Lord's Prayer, I felt these three hard tendons take my hand. It surprised me so much my eyes flew open! There was no one there, of course.

Gift Giving

Deborah Lonon

Every Monday morning, Joe, my chain-smoking, world-weary boss at Seaman's Bank for Savings in New York City reminded me: "Yeah, even if you are one in a million, there's eight more just like you."

Oprah Winfrey listened as Betty Eadie tearfully described her experiences while dead. Evidently, Betty had traveled to heaven and back for over two hours during a botched hysterectomy. An artist attempted to simulate some of her descriptions for Oprah's guests. One scene portrayed hundreds of beams shooting from earth to heaven. They were all different sizes and colors and some were much thicker than others. Ms. Eadie said this showed prayers coming to God from earth. Oprah asked why some of the beams were so thick, and Ms. Eadie said, "Oh, those are the prayers coming from mothers."

My mother was home alone watching *Jeopardy* in Vermilion, Ohio. She got the first question right, then another, then another. Six in all. "Then what happened?" I asked. "I started to get really scared," she said.

I can't understand why Paul McCartney has yet to realize how much I mean to him.

My grandmother was in the hospital dying and there was a red pear ripening on the windowsill. On my last visit, we talked and laughed; I sliced the pear and carefully fed it to her. Later that night, after she died, her roommate noticed it was gone. "Oh good," she said. "She got to eat the pear."

Maurice Sendak says he started thinking about "being down in the dumps" as something other than a psychological state after he visited children living in the street slums of Rio de Janeiro.

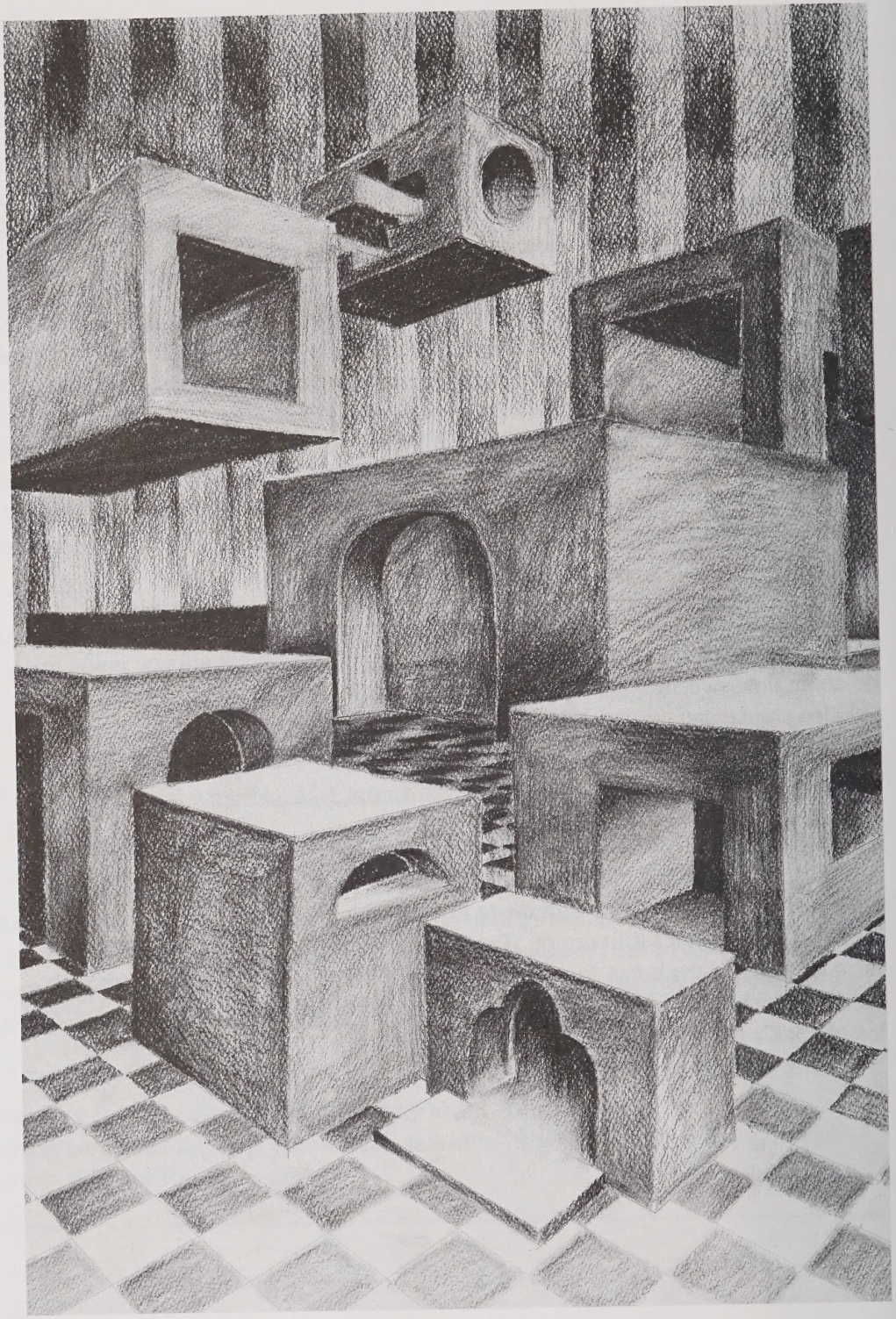
Watching *Bambi* again with my two-year-old son, the similarities between Bambi's mom's life and my own struck hard. She, too, is a single parent with sole responsibility for her child—providing food, care, shelter and life lessons. Meanwhile, Dad, "The Prince," roams the herd.

Two little blond boys, brothers, came to live at the children's home. They looked so much alike I couldn't tell them apart. They were shy and scared. It was important to get their names right. The social worker said she had the same problem until she saw them with freshly washed and combed hair. "Chris is the one with the 'C' carved in his forehead," she told me.

In speech class, we practiced breathing correctly from the diaphragm. We kept a piece of paper from falling off the wall by providing a strong and steady stream of breath to hold it there. My best friend, Don, looked over at me. "For the final exam," he said, "we have to keep up a canoe."

My neighbor Sarah turned to food for solace after her divorce. After a weight gain of well over fifty pounds, I expressed my concern. "What are you going to do about this, sweetie?" I ventured one day. She stubbed out her cigarette, exhaled smoke and replied, "Right now, I'm looking for a color that's darker than black."

My ex-husband refused to come get his belongings from my house after the divorce. One day, disgusted and slightly drunk, I bundled up all of his expensive wool jackets and took them with me to my job at the children's home. Each boy received one, whether it fit or not. Two days later, Ernest Wise, who had been the farm manager of the home for over fifty years, died. I was late to the memorial service. Rushing in the back door, I recognized, scattered throughout the church, six of Rick's jackets.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Excerpt from *The Words of the Prophets*

JD Shackelton

"Johannes, darlin', I have to tell you something." Mary held her son in her lap as she sat on the couch. The boy's large, brown eyes looked into hers expectantly, like a trusting puppy whose master had never struck him. Seeing this, she could not speak. Her eyes filled and one tear escaped, tracking its uncertain way down her cheek.

"Don't cry, Mommie," the boy said, his own eyes serious with innocent sympathy. Mary hugged him to her and stared at blurry curtains on the bay window and outside at leaves that were just beginning to change color.

"Oh, my God!" The desperate whisper rushed out and died in the air, for amid the vast complexities of the universe no provision had been made for this need. She rocked him in her arms for long moments. He relaxed there, content in familiar warmth. "Mommie has to go away for a while," she was finally able to whisper again. There was no response, so she stopped rocking. He sat up, and she studied his face. "Mommy has to go away today."

"Where, Mommy?"

"To Grandma and Grandpa's house."

"Can I go, too?"

A faint smile. "Not this time," she said. He looked disappointed. "But sometimes I'll come get you and take you there to visit me and Grandma and Grandpa and Peter."

Bewilderment spread across the little brows. "Is baby brother going with you?"

Mary realized she had failed to anticipate this obvious conundrum. How could she explain leaving one son, but taking his brother? "Mommie wants to take you, too, darlin', but Daddy needs you here with him. Mommie loves you, and I'll come back soon and take you to Grandma and Grandpa's. And we'll all have cookies and milk, and you can ride Grandpa's tractor. Won't that be fun?" She forced a smile, hoping he would imitate it, but he didn't. "Darlin', Mommie loves you. I promise I'll come get you."

Half an hour later Johannes stood in the doorway to the dining room watching as William and Mary spoke in hushed tones with Mary leaning over the couch, changing Peter's diaper. Then she took the baby in her arms and moved to where Johannes stood. She knelt down and forced another smile as she looked into those large, sad eyes. She let Peter stand on wobbly legs beside her, supporting him with her hands. "Would you like to kiss brother good-bye?" she asked. Johannes regarded her silently, his somber eyes meeting hers with no response. His arms hung at his sides. His lower lip protruded just a little, but it did not quiver. Not a muscle twitched until his eyes blinked and then resumed their vacant staring. Mary's free arm embraced him. "I love you," she whispered. "Hug me good-bye,

Darlin'." But his arms remained passive. Mary let go and looked at him again. His eyes met hers but betrayed no feeling. He remained still. Mary stood, lifted Peter in her arms, and slowly backed away, watching Johannes. When she reached the hall doorway she forced another smile and gave him a little wave.

"Bye, Darlin'." Then she slipped into the hall, her eyes releasing the pent-up hurt in her heart. William followed her.

Johannes stood as they had left him until he heard the front door close and car doors slam. Then he crossed the living room and stood at the window. He pulled back the curtain and looked out, his head barely above the window sill. He watched his mother's gray DeSoto pull out of the drive way, turn left, and proceed down Julliard Avenue, disappearing in the distance. He stared at the street. It lay empty and barren as far as he could see until the trees blocked it from view. He stared at the trees, still like a picture because the air hung motionless around them. He stared at the grass, but nothing disturbed its even surface. No car came to violate the silence left behind. Not a branch or leaf whispered above the muted green lawn across the timeless quiet. Tears slipped down the boy's cheeks and his small shoulders heaved. From a dark womb in his heart an invisible hand crawled upward, clutched his throat, and closed like a vise.

Feet and legs were everywhere the boy looked. Shiny black shoes on tiptoes, long ones flat on the floor with raised ridges and tiny holes decorating their blackness or brownness. Dark pant legs rested on the flat ones. The legs of those on tiptoes wore stockings with dark seams in the back disappearing under dress hems at the knees or below. A forest of feet and legs on soft carpet so everyone can come and go quietly. Noise isn't allowed, which is why children must hold parents' hands and not talk. Being quiet was no problem for the boy because he hadn't uttered a word for eight months, and now no one expected him to. But here, even grown-ups must not speak except softly. Only the man in the front behind the tall desk can talk so everyone can hear him, and he must wait until after everyone sings. Then he talks for a long time. And children must sit very still on the long, padded seat and stare up at the ceiling, which is very far away and very unfriendly like cold sheets in winter before the bed warms, only this ceiling never warms or comforts. It stays far away. The songs are far away, too, even though the people are standing all around singing above him.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The boy didn't like the ghost part. It scared him and confused him. And the music belonged to the ceiling, way above him and strange and cold and meaningless.

His shoes didn't touch the floor, and even if he straightened his legs and arched his feet and stretched the toes of his patent leathers to their utmost, he

could not make contact with the back of the pew in front of him. The singing stopped and the man talked, but the boy could not understand. He knew many of the words, but they were put together so he couldn't hear what they meant. He shifted position and tried to scratch a place while no one saw, but his father rested a hand on the boy's leg. Nothing was said, but the boy understood. He sat without moving for a long time. Still the man talked. The boy didn't like church. He was not sure he would like God either.

The boy leaned forward a little to look around his father at the lady sitting close to him on the other side. Lydia. She was here every Sunday now and had been at the boy's house several times, but he was puzzled. He wasn't sure where to put her. Is she like Aunt Elizabeth? Or like the lady next door who drives the big red car with no top? Or, since she's always with Daddy, is she like Mommy?

Mommy. He had seen her a few days ago. And baby brother, who was talking now. The boy had tried to answer his brother, but couldn't. Daddy had taken him to the doctor, but the doctor hadn't known how to help small boys who had forgotten how to talk.

The lady came home with them again—Lydia. She talked to him like Mommy talked to baby brother. Daddy didn't say much to him but talked to the lady a lot. The boy smiled but said nothing.

Now in his comfortable trousers and play shoes and shirt with no tie or jacket, he felt free again. The back yard was not a yard at all, but a great forest with large trees and giant bushes that call a small boy's soul to adventure. It was all enclosed in a tall wooden fence, so he was often left to roam at will, especially when Lydia was visiting.

He stood on the back porch listening to the chirps and tweets and mating calls. He didn't know the words, but he understood the message. The birds were saying that blue is a wonderful color for the sky and that air was a delicious thing to breathe and grass was a perfect place for bare feet to walk and it was fun to play "let's find the seeds," and they were thanking the earth and the sky by singing their happy little hymns and chasing each other and weaving cozy nests in the arms of branches or in the shadowy comfort of sheltering shrubs.

The boy could not say these things or even think their words, but he knew them. He knew all of them. And they all pleased him. The high ceilings and somber tones of church could be forgotten for another week, and he could run among the budding trees and spring flowers and lush shrubbery and watch the birds. He squinted up at the sky. He felt he could reach up and touch it. It didn't seem nearly as high and far away as the church ceiling. The birds flew through that sky, but he was quite sure they wouldn't be welcome in the ceiling or on the pews or the carpet where all the shoes walked.

The boy descended the steps to the lawn. The thick grass felt good to roll on. Cool grass and blue sky and friendly trees towering protectively over him. He had learned to count, and he counted ten trees, then heard Sam barking. He ran to the dog house and dropped to his knees. The puppy squirmed and wiggled and

shook and jumped and yapped and wagged and licked all at once in a jumble of happiness that couldn't contain itself. The boy didn't know dog language, but he understood the puppy loved him. He petted Sam and squeezed him and held him to his face and kissed him, and Sam, who knew nothing of either English or the thoughts of little boys, also understood.

The boy released the clasp on the chain and Sam ran and the boy jumped up and ran after him. Together they ran as if there were no fence around the yard, or around any yard anywhere, or around any life. They ran as if running were what life was made for and the very best way to celebrate it. They ran around trees, and Sam stopped and flattened his face and front paws on the grass with his rump sticking up and his tail wagging and he growled and yipped and the boy laughed inside and ran at him, and Sam scurried around another tree and under a bush, then scampered across the lawn.

But celebration can be tiring. After a while the boy crawled into the shady alcove of several large and spreading shrubs that had grown adjacent to one another and formed a kind of den where the grass was sparse in the soft earth and a small boy could feel hidden and his puppy could feel safe to rest and pant and look up into his master's eyes and they could exchange secrets there and no one would know.

On this particular Sunday afternoon beneath the protective cover of these particular shrubs, while Mr. Bradford and Lydia discussed plans for the future, a small miracle occurred. For months the boy had not been able to ask for another helping of tapioca pudding or answer the doctor's questions or say "I love you," when his mother hugged him and cried. He had wanted to, but he couldn't. Now, as the new spring air breathed sweet flowers and fertile earth into the boy's wondering soul and he looked into the big brown eyes of this beagle puppy who licked his nose and nuzzled into his arms, he felt happy. He felt closeness and love that was, for a few brief minutes, unafraid of loss.

As he rested there in the quiet of this feeling, a bird rustled the small branches near him. She seemed not to know he was there, and Sam didn't move to chase her. In her beak she carried a tiny thread which she began to weave into a small structure not four feet away from the boy and his dog. She was a late mother, and seemed to know it, so industrious was her labor. The boy watched her shuttle between the chosen branches and the yard, returning each time with a twig or bit of grass. He knew what she was doing and what she would do when the twigs had become a nest. His mother had told him about nests. Nests were good.

For several minutes the boy sat, and the dog, silent witnesses to one of earth's common miracles. Finally, the mother-to-be rested in the nest, satisfied that her preparations were adequate. The boy could see her little eyes, her soft feathers, alert tail. He watched her stillness. For long moments she didn't move. The boy didn't move. The dog didn't move. As the boy watched her, a deep repose settled over him. His eyes became heavy, and he nearly slept.

Then the bird flew away, and the boy noticed something in the nest. It was tiny and round. He looked at it, then at his dog. The brown eyes of the dog looked up silently, saying nothing and everything. "I love you, Sam," the boy thought. Sam nuzzled deeper into the boy's arms. "You're my best friend," the boy said aloud.

Drawing by Joyce Dover

Resents Transplanting

Lee Sokol

"Resents transplanting" reads the warning on the seed packet
of *cosmos bipannatus* I ordered for this summer's garden.
I wonder at such emotion coming from a tiny seedling.
I imagine the little plant fuming with resentment
At the monstrous human parent who plucked him
From the soft bed of the seed flat in the southern window,
Patting him into a trowel-sized hole in the still-cold yard,
Leaving him to endure wind, drought, insects, late frosts,
And the neighbor's cat looking for an easy place to dig.

And if the little plant survives the transplanting
To live a life of resentment against this early uprooting,
Who does he turn to for consolation, for understanding?
I stay up late nights, poring through my gardening books,
Looking for plants who will be his friends through adolescence,
Ones who will help him grow into a well-adjusted adult.

Not the rose. She's too busy primping, and too thorny anyway.
The cleome won't do. His tall elegance might make
My simple daisy-like cosmos jealous and insecure.
And though the *papaver somniferum* is also a simple flower
And doesn't take well to transplanting either, his brand of solace
Is much too alluring and dangerous for my troubled young plant.

The bachelor button at first seems like a perfect possibility,
With a strong male name to show my cosmos how to be manly.
But then I remember he is also known as cornflower and no one
Can get the two names straight, causing constant confusion.
A plant with an identity crisis surely can't be of much help.

Then one night I find the information that relieves me of my worries,
Letting me know that my little plant just might overcome all this resentment.
Alongside a full-color photo of a bed of cosmos in brilliant bloom,
I read the caption "Cosmos thrives on neglect."

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Communication in Space

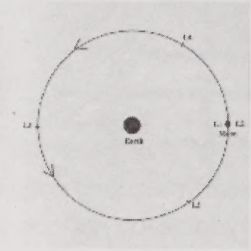
Jonathan Graham

Orbital theory begins with the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630). Without the benefit of Newtonian physics, he empirically derived three laws that describe planetary motion in our solar system and the orbits of artificial satellites:

1) The orbit of a satellite with respect to the earth is an ellipse, the earth being at one of the foci.
2) A line drawn from the earth to a satellite sweeps across equal areas in equal times.
3) The square of the time a satellite takes to complete one orbit is proportional to the cube of its mean (average) distance from the earth.

The first law deals with the shape of an orbit, a circular orbit being a special case of the ellipse. The second law covers the speed of a satellite at various points along the orbit, and the third law has to do with the satellite's orbital period. The closer a satellite's orbit is to the earth, the faster it moves and the shorter its orbital period.

The French-Italian astronomer Joseph Louis Lagrange (1736-1813) calculated stable points in the orbit of one body around another where gravitational forces were balanced. His work was relatively forgotten until it was noticed that asteroids in the orbit of Jupiter tended to gather at these Lagrangian points, L1 through L5.



In 1969 Gerard K. O'Neill, a physics professor at Princeton, asked his students to design a large living environment in space, rather than on a planet or a moon. He published papers at Princeton in 1974 on the construction of space colonies at L5, the most stable position in the lunar orbit, 240,000 miles from the earth.

In this plan, solar-powered magnetic launchers would propel material from the moon to L2 where it would be caught by a large "catcher's mitt" and then be moved to L5 where it would be used to build large space habitats for thousands of people. One design is two counter-rotating cylinders (with a net spin of zero) always pointed toward the sun. Each cylinder would be built of strips of land and glass and would have a diameter of up to four miles and a length of up to twenty miles. A cylinder this size would rotate once every two minutes to provide one G of centrifugal force and would house up to one million people.

Lunar ore is rich in aluminum and titanium, and oxygen would be a plentiful by-product of solar-powered refining. Carbon, nitrogen, and hydrogen are scarce on the moon, so these would have to be transported from the earth. In particular, liquid hydrogen would be carried in large tanks to make thousands of gallons of water. Alternatively, these raw materials might be obtained in a low-gravity environment from asteroids.

There are three kinds of asteroids located between Mars and Jupiter. Collectively, they are rich in iron, nickel, magnesium, water, hydrocarbons, and nitrogen. They could also provide raw materials for the construction of space colonies and space ships. They might be moved from their orbits by rockets and placed in orbits near the earth, or a solar-powered manufacturing plant might be constructed at the Martian Lagrangian point L5.

After the habitats are constructed, the space colonists could earn their living by manufacturing solar-to-electric power plants to be placed in geosynchronous orbit at an altitude of 22,323 miles in the equatorial plane. The geosynchronous orbit, proposed by Arthur C. Clarke in 1947, is the orbit most commonly used by television and other communications satellites today. It has the advantage of serving fixed-dish, rather than tracking, antennas. These satellite power plants would collect solar energy and beam it as microwave energy to receiving stations on earth where it would be sold as electricity at commercial rates.

Critics of this plan say the geosynchronous orbit is already crowded and the microwave energy is likely to be disruptive to communications and also ecologically harmful. However, the idea of mining the moon for raw material, using solar power to smelt metals, and manufacturing large living environments and even planet-sized space ships in space remains tenable. The essential ingredients for living—light, air, gravity, land, and food—could be easily supplied to a living environment in space.

The far side of the moon would be an especially good environment for radio astronomy because antennae and other receiving equipment would be shielded from radio-frequency interference from the earth. Large parabolic reflectors might be constructed in craters or mounted on poles above the moon's surface. Received signals could be combined to create a very large virtual "dish" with great focusing power. Data gathered from this equipment could be transferred to the earth by lunar-orbiting satellites.

Radio-frequency signals from the earth to the moon or to space colonies at L4 or L5 take about one and one-quarter seconds to travel one way, not long enough to stifle interactive communication. In space-to-space transmissions there is no atmosphere to absorb the shorter wavelengths, so transmission frequencies above the radio frequency range, including laser light, x-rays, and positrons, could be used for communication. Optical lenses, small parabolic reflectors, and electrostatic and magnetic fields might focus these shorter wavelengths and particles.

Plans for colonizing Mars in the next two hundred years might include the construction of a "shuttle bus" placed in an elliptical orbit around Earth and Mars with a period of two years. Signals from Earth to Mars take between three and twenty-two minutes to travel in one direction, depending on the relative position of the two planets, and Mars would be eclipsed by the Sun at its greatest distance from the earth every two years.

Because of these time delays, communication would be less interactive and more terse. A radio-controlled robot on Mars would necessarily be intelligent enough to make decisions while awaiting further communication from Earth.

Travel distances will be the major restriction for interstellar people-to-people communication. There are eleven stars within 11.1 light years from us, a limit for human migration using present travel technology. At greater distances than these, we might communicate with non-human intelligence.

Fusion power will be the breakthrough in interstellar travel. Traveling near the speed of light, the passengers will experience relativistic time-dilation effects, extending travel distances and human migration throughout the galaxy.

According to relativity theory, developed by Max Planck and Albert Einstein, a distance like 100 light years would take much less than 100 years to travel, as measured on the ship. As the ship approaches the speed of light, the travel time becomes almost instantaneous.

There are two major designs that can provide artificial gravity for interstellar travel: One is a flat ship or an apartment building that accelerates and decelerates at one G, a space elevator. The other is the rotating Stanford torus, living in a doughnut.

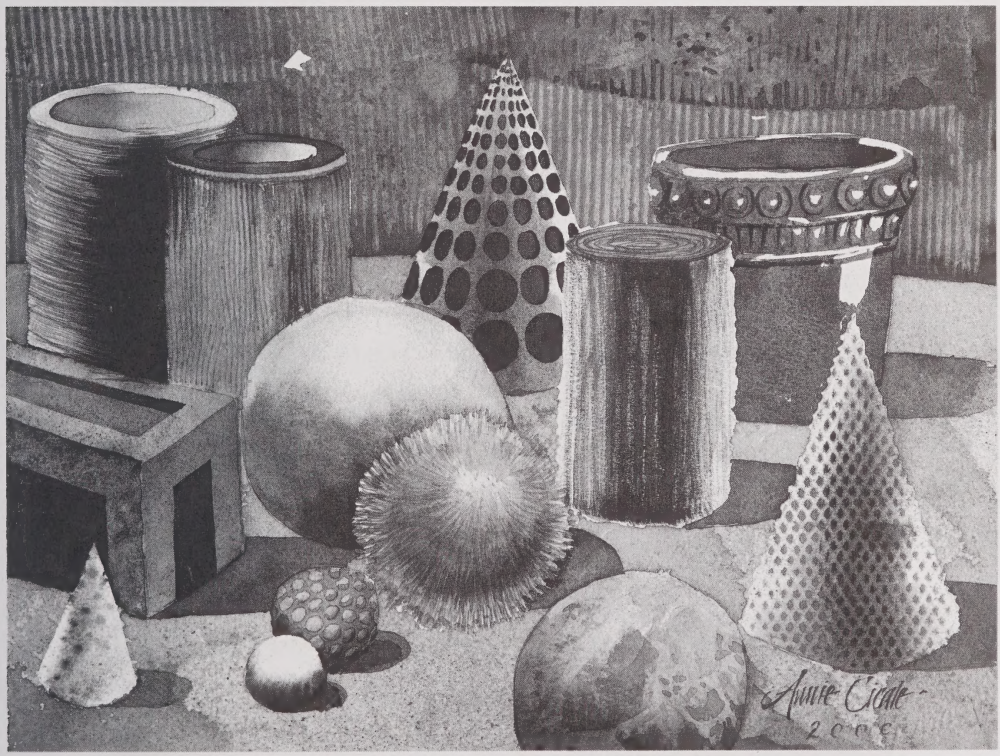
The front part of the interstellar space ships will be a huge scoop to collect free hydrogen in space to use as fuel. The middle will either be an apartment building or some variant of a rotating wheel or cylinder. The rear will be the fusion engine, which will use the controlled power of a hydrogen bomb for propulsion.

Interstellar space ships will be like small traveling stars. They will communicate throughout the galaxy by modulating their fusion reactions and exhaust. The output of entire stars might also be modulated by gravity or by huge plates in space with electrostatic or magnetic fields for communication at maximum distances.

Interstellar communication will be slow. Requests for physical supplies will not be important, since the travel time will be so great. Scientific data, music, philosophy, and the visual arts might be the major subjects of conversation for mutating gene pools of divergent civilizations.

These red-shifted, long-distance messages will become historical records, traveling backwards in time through an expanding universe. Such communication would tend to be one-way and documentary in nature. It could be made more effective by including if-then-else or case a, b, c logic in questions that anticipate long-delayed replies. The problem of administrators dominating the mikes might be overcome by sorting information contained in the conglomerate of many individual data packets at the receiver.

There are one to two hundred billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy, which rotates once every 200 million years. It has a diameter of 100,000 light years and is 5 to 10,000 light years in thickness. The Local Group, the half-dozen galaxies of which we are a part, is also a further boundary.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Water Dreams

Rebecca K. Davis

I knew him when his boat
was a tiny Boston Whaler
All flat, blunt-nosed, well-worn
and well-loved for it reflected his life.

He was scruffy like a mongrel puppy
All red-headed, red-bearded
Lacking only the gold ring in his ear
to show the pirate inside.

We played in and on and explored the water
of our almost-personal lake—all summer long
We fished in the water, we skinny-dipped in the water
And we took moonlight, silent rides on silver.

I knew him when he moved to the coast
and acquired his grand cabin boat, all 34 feet in length
All polished with bedroom, bath and bar.
It was slick with silver chrome and strength.

He was balding and round with eyes that twinkled
and a mouth that crinkled in mischief and fun.
He rode his boat like a horse on the plains
knees absorbing the bumps of the ocean waves.

We played on and in and explored the water
of the fathomless sound—occasionally
We soared and sped through
Sheets of white water while squinting
At the salty sun, all around.

I know him now, when he pictures his three-roomed yacht
With galley, Jacuzzi, and big-screen TV
In dreams he travels down the Intracoastal Waterway
He envisions sunny, slothful summers in the Chesapeake
and winter in the kinky, kinetic Keys.

He dreams of weekends past
And wild, carefree campfires
That burn images of total abandon
And wanton, unbridled fun.

We paid homage and were lastingly loyal to the beer gods
And we appeased Poseidon for the use of his water
We miss the old, small boat with every passing decade
When life was simpler, slower and clear

But he still transforms to Neptune, becoming almost tall
With his latest boat becoming his trident true
Always hoping newer, bigger toys make up for long, lost times
As he rides the waving, washing waters to forget or perhaps to recall.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Going

Deborah Harmon

Loss upon loss
Home, but not yours
They call it a home
Anyway

Breathing labored
Vision fading
Not enough strength to right yourself in the chair
Or pull a blanket to warm you

Tremors growing
Speech sliding
A lift to move you from place to place
A constant need for a glass of cool water

Dependent
On the care of professionals
The whims of workers
The kindness of anyone

Don't give up on her I encourage the staff
Don't give up on yourself I encourage her
Don't give up I echo
To myself

Still there are moments
A passion for reading still shared
Now we explore those worlds out there
Time suspended together

Brightening as we discuss
Grandchildren and trials and tribulations of everyday life
Snippets of the outside brought in
A little mail, treasured, read and reread.

Days of pain
Of boredom too heartrending to consider carefully
Kisses and expressions of love
Can't erase reality

Loss
Yours
And
Mine

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Jumping Into Memory

Chris Tibbetts

A woman stands quietly on the covered dock of the lake, leaning over the railing, breathing deeply the swampy odor of the freshwater lake. She observes the action around her, unbothered by the raucous shouts of water skiers yelling directions to their drivers in the powerboats or the taunting dares yelled by teenagers to their friends high up in the limbs of the nearby cypress tree. As each inboard craft makes its pass around the perimeter of the cove, the wake increases in intensity as the sound of the motor dies. The wakes of the boats slap rhythmically against the dock posts and shore, insistent at first, and then slowly losing intensity, until the water comes again to a temporary lull.

The dock vibrates with the flip-flopped footsteps of a boy and a girl, weighed down with all their fishing gear—tackle boxes, long bamboo poles, fish net, and a crushed sandwich bag partly filled with pieces of sandwich bread and Oscar Mayer, destined to become bait. Both adolescents are freckled and towheaded, reflecting a summer spent outdoors, and they each have the same blue eyes squinting into the glare of the sun that bounces off of the water's surface. As the woman watches, the children progress to the end of the dock with their equipment, surprisingly graceful despite their gangly limbs, still too long for the rest of their bodies. The hint of a smile pulls the older woman's eyes into slits, only the crinkles at the corners giving away her age. A faraway look comes into her eyes as she turns back to the lake. As she gazes into the water's reflection, she remembers . . .

"I won't tell if you won't tell."

"Mom said we're not allowed to even go NEAR the Jump Tree! If she finds out, we're dead!"

"The only way she'll find out is if we die jumping, in which case we couldn't get into trouble, because we'd be dead. Besides, we're never going to catch any fish today—all the boats are scaring them away, even if they would bite this nasty wheat bread. I wish Mom would start buying Wonder Bread again."

"Well, OK, but if we get caught, it's your fault!" The boy and girl pack their tackle neatly and pile it near the bank. They nervously look up at the long limb of the tree hanging over the water, seemingly a mile high.

"I'll go first!" the girl calls out, her bravado hiding the nervousness underneath. She takes off her shorts and camp T-shirt, revealing a chlorine-faded tangerine one-piece. She begins to climb up the rope ladder that hangs down the trunk, her legs strong and sure after a summer of activity. Avoiding the temptation to look downwards, she counts the ladder's rungs as she climbs—twenty, twenty-five, twenty-seven . . . . With one last burst of effort, she

pulls herself up into the crook of the tree and waves to her brother below. Then she inhales deeply before taking a tentative first step onto the limb. Her feet search for the best foothold, like a tightrope walker at the circus, every toe put to use. She takes another baby step, and then another, out onto the limb. As she gets closer to the thin end, the limb wobbles slightly with her weight and she pauses to regain her balance, arms out to her sides, knees bent to absorb the limb's movement. Over water now, she feels more at ease—if she were to lose her balance, her fall would be cushioned. Even so, she knows the jump is not without risk, because the water is not very deep at that point. From watching the older kids jump, she knows that she must leap out as far as she can, beyond the point where the water is shallow enough to see through to the bottom, out into the greenish-brown opaque water beyond the shoreline. Otherwise, she will be impaled upon the cypress tree knees, their knobby cylindrical roots protruding out of the water's surface.

Not wanting her younger brother to detect her fear, she turns the last few steps into a running leap, hurling herself feet first into the air. A moment of seeming suspension—then the long, leaded drop before violently plunging into the still water below. For a moment she feels disoriented, not knowing which way is up, then remembers to extend her legs to cushion the impact before she hits the lake floor. As soon as she feels gooey mud floor squishing up through her toes, she immediately reverses the propulsion, with her strong legs shooting herself up and out of the water like a rocket. As she breaks the surface, she gasps for air, the adrenaline still rushing through her veins. A victorious smile lights up her face, the joy reflected in her brother's face as well, until she says, "Your turn!"

He suddenly looks the full three years younger that he is, a small boy looking fear in the face, wanting to give into it. But, in true comrade style, he walks over to the rope ladder, and with his first foothold, commits to follow her lead.

The woman wakes up from her reverie with a start as the young girl yells, "I've got one!" The woman can't keep from laughing with glee as the girl struggles as if fighting a ten-pound bass and is finally rewarded with the catch of a two-ounce bream. The girl grips the fish around the belly, being careful to hold the sharp fins downwards inside the palm while she expertly removes the hook from the fish's mouth. Then, without ceremony, she tosses the fish back into the water below; the observer intuitively knows that for the girl the fun of fishing is in the thrill of the first tug of the line more than the capture of another life. As the woman watches, she can't help but wonder at what point in her own life she last commanded that total lack of self-consciousness that the young girl in front of her embodies.

"Let's go to the swimming area and catch some minnows—my turtles

have eaten almost all of the ones we got last week."

"OK, but not the pretty black and white speckled one—it's too neat to become turtle food." Brother and sister gather their belongings, including the all-important net, and start off down the narrow trail which meanders down the length of the park next to the water's edge. The dense carpet of pine needles, layering years upon years, muffles their footsteps as they walk single file. As they round a curve, leaving one azalea-encircled "room" and heading into the next, they peek around the corner before continuing, stopping to make sure the secluded area is not being used by a couple for some private necking. Interrupting that gooey stuff always makes them feel embarrassed. The coast is clear, so they continue. Several "rooms" later they pass the Grecian-style monument—five white columns supporting a small terrace and sitting ledge. They never linger here unless Mom is with them; she likes to use this monument to stage "Kodak Moments"—when they were younger, she made them wear coordinated "his-and-her" outfits.

They finally make it to "the wall," a small horizontal cement wall used to prevent the boats' wakes from splashing up and eroding the bank, on which perches a bench. The wall causes the water there to form shallow pools, ideal breeding grounds for minnows, snails, and small turtles. Instead of jumping off of the wall into the water, which would frighten the minnows away, the children sit down on the ledge and gingerly ease into the shallows. The girl and boy resemble egrets, bent over, silently stalking their prey; with a "whoosh," surprising in its suddenness, one child pounces upon some unsuspecting creature. Next comes the expectant look into the bottom of the net. One set of blue eyes immediately knows the outcome by the look of disappointment or happiness in the other set. In the background near the center of the park, a wedding is taking place, a common occurrence here in the serene park; the juxtaposition of the formal ceremony alongside the bait-catching episode a tableau of contrasts. When the kids capture as many minnows as they need (with the bonus of two snails), they pack up quietly and skirt the edges of the ceremony, the girl looking on surreptitiously. Even though she is at the age when boys other than her brothers are icky and have cooties, she thinks, "When I get married someday, I want to have the wedding here."

If only deciding a thing could make it so, the woman reflects. On this trip she is traveling by herself, but the last time she visited she was with her husband-to-be. It had been important to her to bring her beloved to this place to share its peace and beauty, even though they would not be married here, as she had envisioned as a child. Practical reasons like logistics and finances had prevented the realization of the childhood daydream. She pointed out the Jump Tree and other landmarks as they strolled along the trails, had a stranger take their photograph at the Greek monument, and even smooched a little in the hidden azalea "room." But instead of being content to sit on the lakeside bench and watch

crew practice, he had said with a smirk, "It must be nice for them to be able to row every afternoon after classes instead of going to work."

"I'm sure some of them have part-time jobs."

"Maybe, but they don't have to work."

The distinction noted, she realized that her memories would always be that—hers—miraculously preserved from childhood, untainted by the pessimism of an adult's mind. She and her future husband would make their own memories together, but those she had made with her brother would always stay in an exclusive place in her mind's eye.

They run like banshees, barefoot alongside the canal's walls, racing to beat the progress of the boat in the shallow moat. They run hysterically, their speed a race according to the complex rules of some make-believe game. The pot-bellied, middle-aged strangers in the boat look on with bemusement, their condescending smirks expressing that stale expression "kids will be kids." They have forgotten the joy of running full out for the sake of running, the desperate exhilaration of the last few days of summer— extending playtime past dusk into early evening with the aid of flashlights and a full moon. They do not need the convenient light provided by these beams; they know the park's contours as well as those of their own homes and can navigate their way back blindfolded if need be.

The barked orders of the crew boat's coxswain remind her of the time; reassuring in its constancy, college crew practice has always begun promptly at four o'clock. The woman turns and walks slowly down the dock towards the shore, waving a friendly good-bye to the kids still fishing. Perhaps someday she and her brother will bring their own children here to play, giving them the gift of time to be kids, to make memories of their own, and to have only fears of the kind that can be conquered by closing one's eyes and jumping.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Post-Women's Poetry Night at Malaprop's Café
Inspirational Goulash

Bonnie Temple Cassara

I want to write tonight
something that's outta sight
something with guts and gusto
something
I would be proud to show
something
meaningful and deep
something
rich and wide and steep
yep, I want to write something rich
I want to write something that will hitch
my wagon to a star and shoot it far
into the milky way of meaningful stuff

but kinda off the cuff

yes, I want to write something thick with incredible wit
that's subtle a bit
yet probing and somehow poking fun at it

now that's getting close to it

I want to write something wild, carnivorous and beastly
but on the edges tinged with saintly and priestly,
yet sensual and sizzling, smoking and steaming,
heaping some audience appeal on all that meaning

I want to write something brilliant and scintillating
It could even be about mating or masturbating
something shimmering and glimmering
full of puns and alliterations,
onomatopoeias and immaculate gradations

of meaning

Yes, I will write something marvelous, impeccable and perilous
I will write something feisty and festive and garrulous
I'll write it tonight!
I'll write it with guts and with gusto
and it will be

outta sight!

Painting by Bonnie Temple Cassara

Mars Plea Bargain

Jim Bailey

Please Goddess Venus
For a sister
Render a verdict
Final not fatal
A wound appropriate
But not disabling

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

The Chapel

Dara Llewellyn

The Spinnets, an older couple, no children,
Attended Hominy Valley Baptist when the doors were open.
They stood as supporters when my parents joined the church,
Mrs. Spinnet holding my hand.

They lived near the foot of Mt. Pisgah,
A home in the forest, graced by wild flowers,
And invited us home for Sunday dinner
Fried chicken, green beans, corn on the cob.

Once, Mrs. Spinnet took me by the hand,
Walked me out to the edge of the woods,
And there, just past a stand of pines,
Showed me a congregation of jack-in-the-pulpits.

The mountain flowers created their own church,
Tall green pulpits, bobbing purple-green flags,
Waving in the hushed, pine-needle forest,
Silent testimony to the Creator of All.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Time Standing Still

Rebecca K. Davis

This house oozed character
like that poignant scent in the air
that crosses time to sweep you back, instantly
to that first moment you entered.

The chandelier had a ruby-red, two-inch, glass marble
hanging from the glittery, glass pendants
and candle lights that spidered out
like an upside-down umbrella.

The expensive 1920s couch
was ugly brown velvet
with sloping expansive arms
that I could sit upon.

The carpet with its centered
faded floral pattern
on dull brown wool
reflected the image of the chandelier.

The beveled glass, white oak, built-in book cases
outshone the oak and glass French doors
that lead to the music room, left
and the formal dining room, right.

I looked at the massive staircase
that meandered upstairs with its two landings
one large enough to become my mother's sewing room
with its built-in, hinged benches and porthole windows.

I loved the secret hiding places
the padded benches provided
as they lined the staircase upstairs and down
even if they were just for canned goods.

I pictured dead bodies in the benches
like our own personal caskets
built in for our convenience
with creaky hinges and the smell of death.

Rumor in our family said my grandmother
built her dream house in the middle
of smelly, grimy Canton
so her kids could walk to school.

Pushbutton light switches were all over the house
top white—bottom black, it was dark or it was light
ghosts inhabited the switchboxes
since there was often a delay upon turning on the lights.

Darkness was not my friend when I was little
And there were too many dank, dark closets, canning rooms and pantries—
the house lived on its own terms and in its own time
and it did not like light.

Outside was wonderful and bright
with a veranda and a porch with inviting chairs
a brick terrace above for climbing on the roof
to set off loud firecrackers to light the sky.

The yard was small but safe and comforting—
a Mimosa tree spread its smooth small limbs up
for me to climb and the bark was not rough or dark
but warm and light.

I added a ridiculous rocking footstool
for my throne in my castle tree
I watched for the neighbors, the stalking cats,
the barking dogs, and the slow moving cars

There was no darkness here or ghosts
and time stood still
while I listened to the humming bees in the bee-bush
near the fluffy snowball hedges

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

The Ruby Glasses

Nelda F. Holder

The ruby glasses sat
inside the cabinet
inside the kitchen
inside my grandmother's home
inside the circle of family
inside the heart of my being

They sit there still
as my small hands
remove one just so carefully
and lift it to my ruby lips
to sip the thick white cream
of Christmas, boiled custard
which it now holds
inside its ruby throat
inside the warmth
inside the taste of memory

I never dropped
one ruby glass
one drop of cream
one delicious smile
inside the eyes
inside the face
inside the ruby fireside glow

She is still proud
inside her corset
inside her apron
inside her ritual
inside her future and my past

The Field

Nelda F. Holder

From the kitchen window
Or the tree swing
From the screen porch glider
Or the rocking chair
There was one view

It was a gentle view
Soft to the eye and heart
Full of summer memory
And winter stubble

Leading back to the homestead

The barn, first
Cool cement floor
Hosed by hand
After the morning's milking
The rhythmic, sighing whoosh of the lines
The smell of steaming urine
And molasses-laced feed
The rough pink tongues
And big rolling eyes
Of the soft-flanked bovines
The soap-scented callouses
Of my granddaddy's hands

Then down the driveway
Past the pear tree
The fig bush
To the back door

The sound of the springcoil
Stretching
To open
To open
To open
To open
One time more

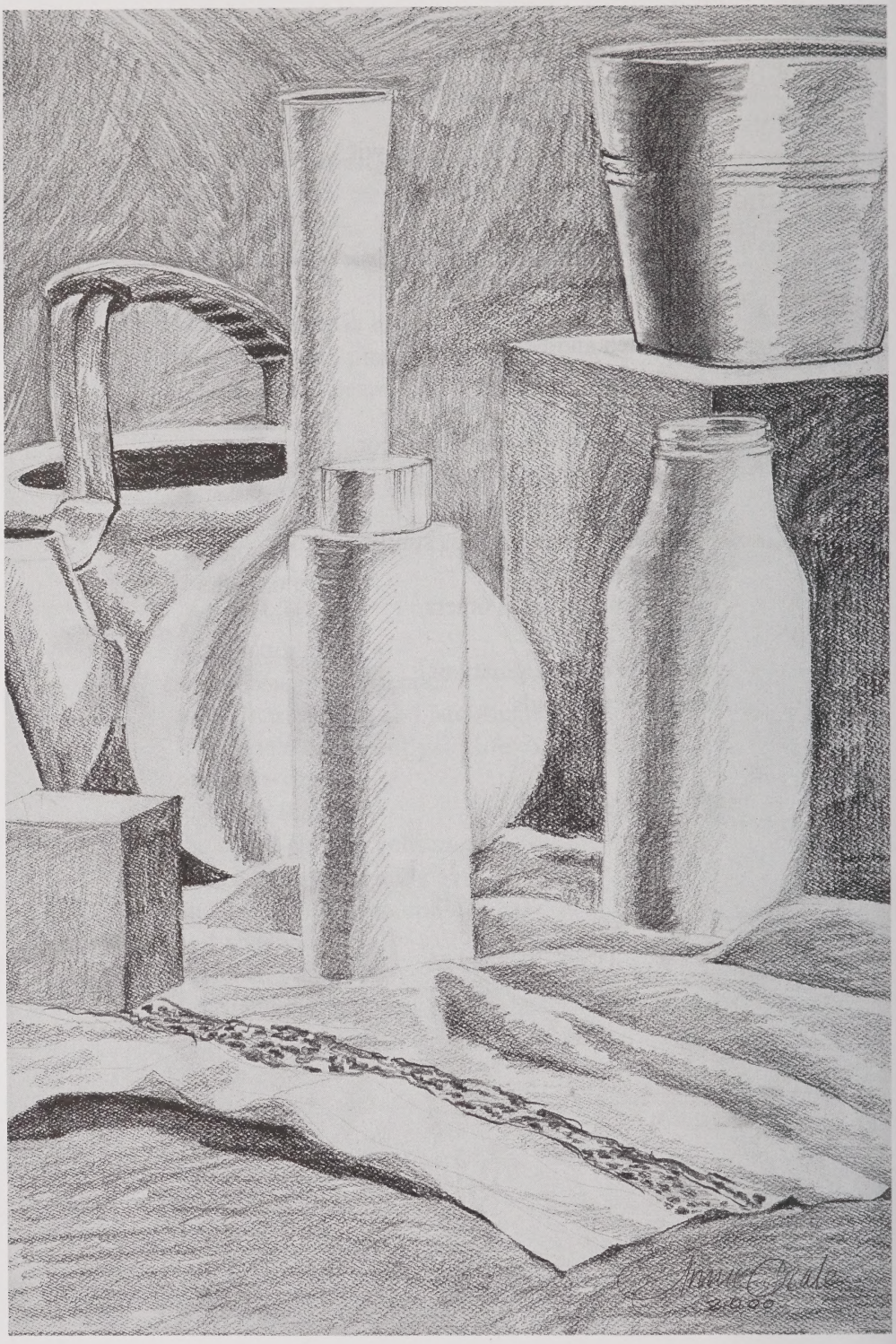
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Chekhov

Julia Duncan

I look at a portrait on my desk
and read words on a page—
savor them—
as if they were written by a lover
to me.
But the picture is of you,
handsome with pince-nez,
mustache and beard,
an image taken
one hundred years ago.
And the words are from letters—
to your sister, describing your journey to Siberia,
its jolting carriage ride over muddy roads,
the frozen nights,
eternal cold. . . ;
a last letter to Olga—
words teasing and tender
to the actress wife and late-found joy
who would be part of your life
only five years.
For your illness,
the blood-spitting consumption—
with its weakness and pain
and treatments of morphine
and arsenic—
snatched you away
(as Shelley might say
Soon, too soon—).

But to me you are alive,
looking intently from the gilt frame
as if eager to hear my thoughts;
and your words are
vibrant with compassion and wit.
It seems I share you—
like a rare secret—
with those I feel most close to
as if I were handing over
a candle
to lighten another's way.
For you reveal the world—
illuminate us—
wise and much-esteemed author.
Like a father, you guide;
like a lover, you caress
with words that make us sublime
in their reading.
So I pass you on to others,
a spark
to ignite our imaginations,
emblaze our souls.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Late to Poems

Jim Bailey

Middle school English and eager to flee
James Dean swaggers and cocked heads
Chopped and channeled chariots
Pink shirts and saddle shoes
Pleasure Island and 13 weeks of bliss
Camp Nowhere and more of the same
Glimpses of greatness and not ever to be
Lines at the Capitol and hope dashed in the street
Fuzzy cheeks and jungle encounters
Pray-for-pay palaces and managed campaigns
Poetry has come home to me

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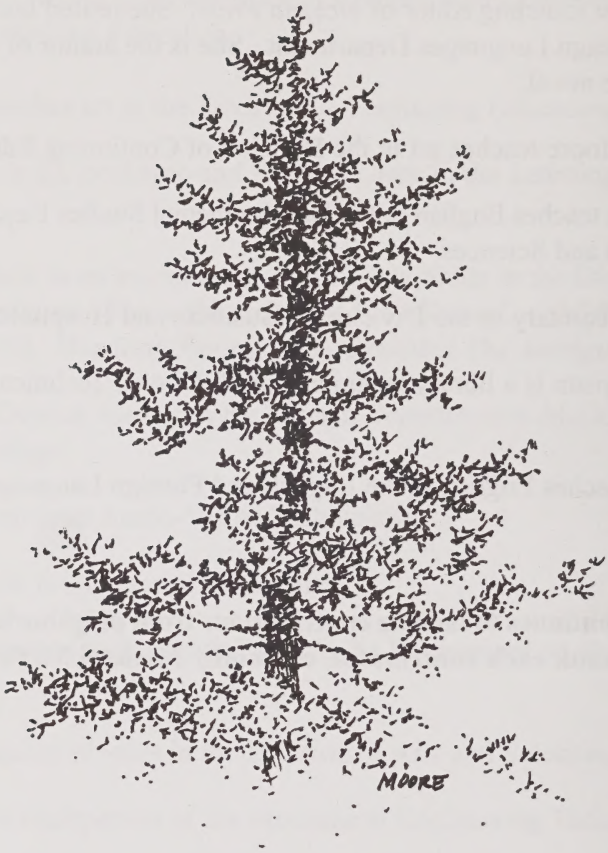
***Victoria Press* continues to include contributions from neighboring community colleges. We thank each contributor, especially Michael McFee.**



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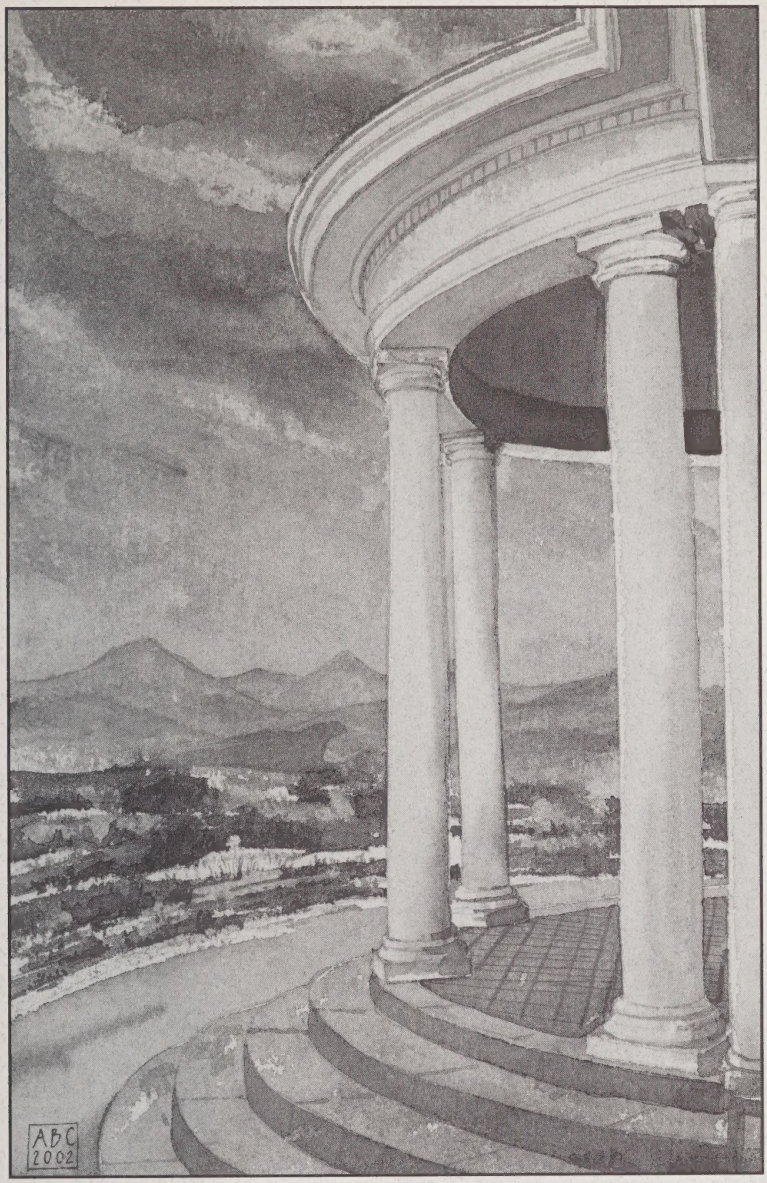

Victoria Press

2002

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Mary Hay Gwynn,
charter editorial board member of *Victoria Press*.

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree
...
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow
...
I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

William Butler Yeats

Victoria Press

Eighth Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2002

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Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College.

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Cover watercolor of Fernihurst Building by Annie Cicale

Drawing by Joan Worth

Better Come Home

Kathryn Stripling Byer

or I'll lasso the trees
and hang out my red dress and silk
shimmy, little black undies.
Don't you know
the devil's a mighty wind
blowing the Tennessee Valley
brown, brown as the mud
on your boots walking
home to a woman like me
who can't wait without
causing more trouble than
she's ever asked for?
So I'll tie this rope tight
enough to hold fast.
Lord, how I love the smell
of wash strung from a clothesline
when night falls
with too much reckless
time on my hands.

Absence

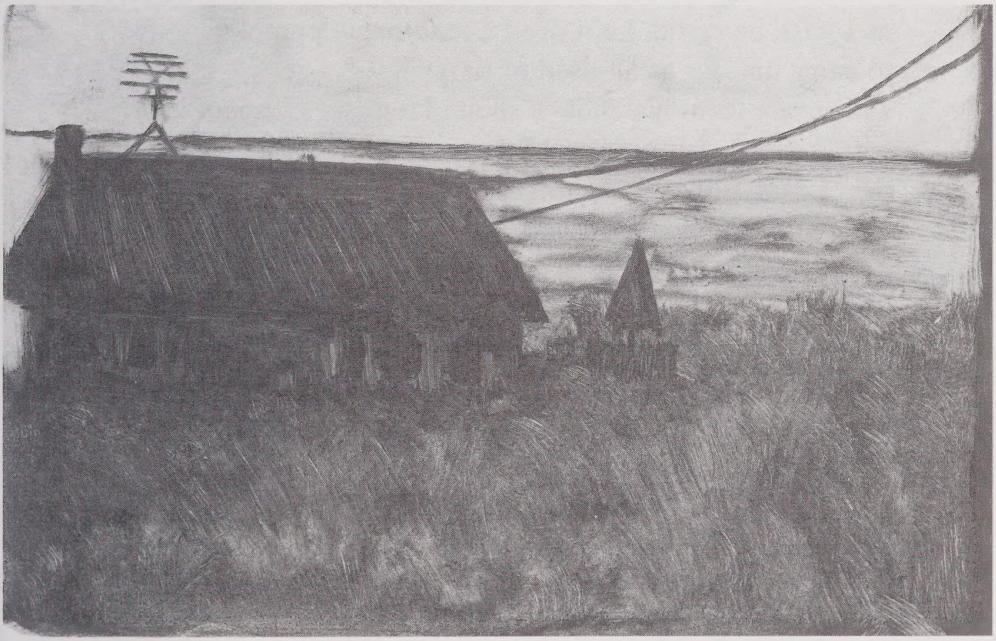
Kathryn Stripling Byer

for my nephew Mitch, on graduation day in Massachusetts

I've thought about this word a lot
lately, so much of what used to be present
now being, obviously, absent. My youth,
for example. We mid-lifers fret
over what's lost, but, frankly, I never much liked
myself young. I do not mourn the loss
of my 20-year-old blooming
face in the mirror. I do miss my sharp eye
for threading a needle, my keen recollection
of even the slightest minutiae from *Gone*
with the Wind. What I miss most
is having my daughter nearby, though her telephone
calls keep us close and our GTE bills
astronomical. More and more I can conceive
of what living without those I love
on this earth will be like. When my daughter,

your cousin, left home, I wrote,
blinded by tears, "Now her absence will run
through my days like a red thread." Which then
made me think about what your great-grandmother said
as I stood at her stove stirring sugar
and more sugar into the mayhaw juice, wanting
the jelly to make in a hurry. "Just keep stirring,"
she told me, over and over again
until, just as she'd promised, the juice spun a thread
from my spoon and we knew
it was ready to pour into glasses for keeping.

That red thread does not, I see
now, reveal absence but rather its
opposite: the things we have loved
remain with us, as rich and, yes,
sticky sometimes, as they ever were.
Absent, I'm with you as surely as I can imagine
an old woman keeps speaking
out of the ruins of her burned to the ground
Georgia kitchen. She wants us to keep
at it. Keep stirring. Spin the red juice
of our lives into skeins that don't loosen
or snap over distance. Or time. Sweet
as blessing spread over the breadth of her
absence. The length, as the crow flies, of mine.



Drawing by Joan Worth

Halloween Again

Kathryn Stripling Byer

and time slides like silk
against silk. When I rose
this morning, I heard Copper
woofing outside, sounding weak as if he'd lost
his voice. Had the pumpkin
I set on the cinder block last night frightened him?

Poor dog, time's almost done him
in. He used to glide through the woods like a silk
scarf tossed on the wind, almost pumpkin
colored in the sun. Now he's lost
in his dream-chases most days, a slow copper
ghost of his former self. If I urge him to rise

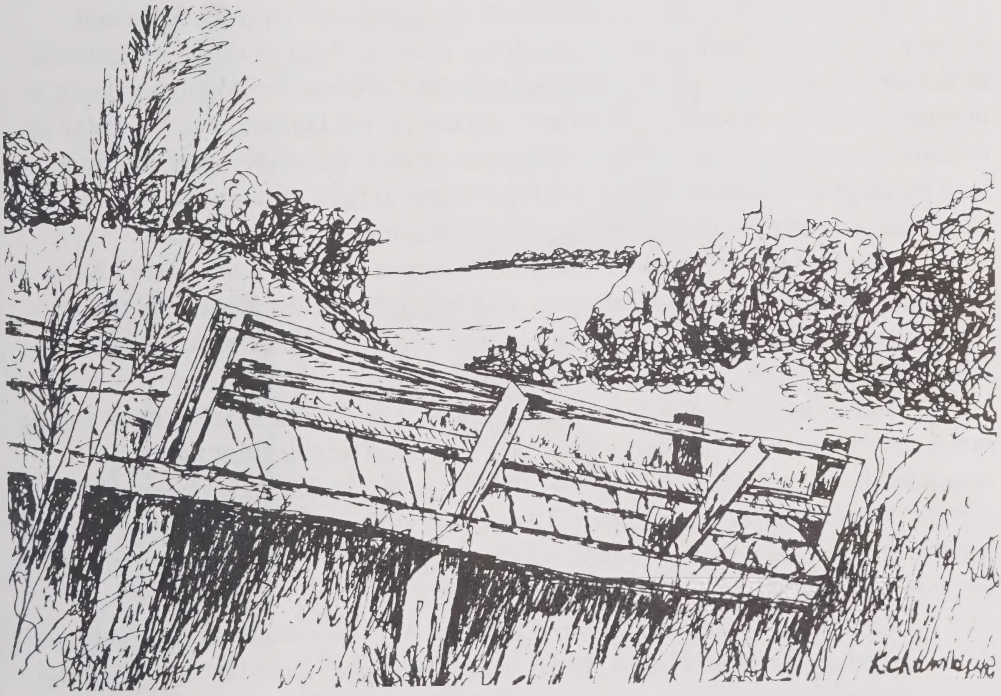
from the shag rug, he won't. If he rose
as I wish he could, he'd need a real magic pumpkin
to carry him far as he used to run, silky
spit strung from his chow's spotted tongue. Copper,
where are you, I'd yell, tripping over the hem
of my nightgown. Easy to get lost

in daydreams this time of year. Lost
letters. Lost memories. Lost copper
earrings a no-longer friend gave me. Split Silk,
I haven't forgotten how the name of that little church rose
from the roadside like a poem, a hymn
to the landscape I passed through. Pumpkins

lay piled beside fields and more pumpkins
than I've ever seen stacked in pyramids. Talk about lost
causes: trying to pay no attention to Copper
who's outside scratching the door to come in! Ahem,
I say, why should you come in, Mr. Smell-like-a Rose
despite everything? Why should you roll in the silky

green swaddle of your doggie dreams? The good folk of Split Silk
Baptist do not believe you have a soul. (Even the best pumpkin
butter can't make bad theology go down, I once scribbled into my lost
book of church supper recipes.) What if what rose
from the dead on the third day was Dog (not a Him)?
Like the one I just let in the front door, our own Copper

god of this place where the pumpkin still waits for a lost Cinderella
to come back home, drop her rose-colored glasses and hitch
up her silks, calling Copper, where are you? Don't leave me.



Drawing by Karen Chambers

Coming Home

Richard J. De Luca

Today, July 25, 2001, I came home. On this day in 1944, my dad was wounded while positioning a section of pontoon causeway at White Beach 2 on Tinian. He died on August 3. He would have turned twenty-six on August 30.

We arrived in North Carolina at 3:45 this afternoon. For me this is not simply a return home, but the beginning of a new life. Today I brought the last load of our personal belongings to Black Mountain, severing a vital connection to Ohio—the connection of things. Many were collected along the way, now having the weathered look of memories, too precious to be discarded. Books, letters, music, garden tools, items for the kitchen. Every card my wife has ever sent me. Others have been lifelong companions in moves to California, Hawaii, Indiana, and New Mexico. A fishing reel of my dad's, wartime photographs, his Purple Heart. A microscope and a set of slides used by my ex-father-in-law in medical school some seventy years ago. A few toys and books from my childhood.

It began to rain as we climbed the mountains of Virginia. Rain and dense fog created a feeling of sleepwalking from the heat of northern flatlands to the coolness of southern highlands. In North Carolina the rain came down in horizontal sheets, obscuring our vision, darkening the landscape to the color of dreams. It is still raining in Black Mountain, gently, forcefully, sunlight punctuated by claps of thunder. I wonder if I will need to pass through the rain and fog each time I return to Ohio, crossing and re-crossing the River Styx.

My things are here with me now. I know a place is home once I have arranged my books, hung the pictures, and begun to ponder where the first changes in the landscaping will take place. It is home when I have brought the dead back to life.

After my dad's death, Railway Express delivered a wooden crate to our home. My mom burst into tears when it was placed on our front porch. It reminded her of a coffin. She would always say it contained Dad's personal effects. Not *belongings*, but *effects*. I've wondered when the shift from belongings to effects takes place. Perhaps it is the passing from this life to another, through rain and fog.

Of course, I remain connected to Ohio. My two daughters live there, as do my stepdaughter and stepson. I will remain a teacher there through a tutorial with a young woman who is one of the finest students I have known. I will remain a friend and mentor to another young woman whose father has just died. I remain connected to a gentleman in his seventies, my closest friend and mentor.

I do not know what this new life will bring. I am confident it will be rich and exciting. It will give me the gift of new experiences, new passages through rain and fog. Eventually it will convert my belongings to effects.

Drawing by Joan Worth

The Sweet Spot

Will Hooper

Aunt Siri felt in her purse for a piece of gum. She hadn't had a stick since we left home a little more than an hour before. She smoked cigarettes thirteen years before but gave them up when her first husband, Alph, died of lung cancer. She finally found the gum and pulled a piece from the packet.

"Ya know, Katherine," she said to my mother, "I always used to tell Alph how I missed these mountains. We lived in Florida for fifteen years, but I never saw anything there as beautiful as North Carolina mountains."

We were driving towards Asheville to see the late October mountains. Aunt Siri hadn't been to North Carolina for a few years, and we figured a trip to the mountains would be a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. So there we were, in my father's 1972 model Buick Electra, surrounded by the murky gray smoke from the tip of his cigarette and hurtling skyward on the twisting gray-black asphalt plane that had a faded yellow and white strip up its middle that was called "Highway 74."

Aunt Siri curled the stick of gum in her mouth and stuffed the wrapper in the car door ashtray. Then she took out her pocketbook mirror and dark-red lipstick and started to apply it to her already darkly painted lips. She noticed that she had enough lipstick on and stuck the mirror and lipstick back into her pocketbook. I thought how strange that red lipstick had always made her look to me, at least as long as I had known her, which could only have spanned back to her late forties. It must have looked better on her when she was young, or she would have never used it. But now the ruddy paste she smeared on her lips made her look like she was wearing an over-sized plastic lip mask like a kid would wear on Halloween. However, it did look right at home with her huge rimmed "Catwoman" glasses that often attached themselves to retired Floridian women.

Time and the Florida sun had not been gentle to Siri. Her face carried the folded creases and brown spots from many sunny afternoons spent working outside in her garden or just sitting in her backyard underneath an orange tree cutting holes in the tops of oranges and sucking out the juice, sometimes sitting right through those five-minute drizzling rains that periodically blew in from the coast.

Ironically, Siri had one up on time. Her face, once supple and firm, had taken on a leatherlike roughness. But the visage that evolved in its place had, in some mysterious way, retained the spirit of her youth, as though that spirit were encased more in an expression of beauty than in beauty itself.

"So what are you doing these days, Jimmy? Are you working now?" she asked me. She spoke in a deep and scratchy voice that still held a youthful energy that named her in my mind.

"No. I'm goin' to college."

"Oh, really? Well, that sounds interesting. Which college are you going to?" she asked, chewing her gum as she talked. She popped her gum like a teenager.

"Isothermal Community College. It's only a few miles from home."

My father, who was driving the car, said without turning around, "I've been tryin' to get the boy to get a job. He spent all last year at that college learnin' electrical wiring. I don't see why he needs to spend any more time in school when he could be out makin' money."

My mother, sitting on the passenger side of the front seat, looked at him, and with an exhausted but determined voice said, "I'swaney Henry, that's all you can talk about these days. I thought we'd already settled this. Let the boy go to college if he wants to. I'm sick and tired of hearing you gripe about it."

"Well, it's just that he could be makin' a lot of money, Katherine," my father said defensively.

"Well I'm sure that Siri doesn't want to hear all this. Let's just save it for later." And with that, the issue temporarily closed, to my great relief.

"Well I think it sounds like fun." Aunt Siri said, ending the statement with a deep and gentle laugh, popping her gum. "I never did get to go to college, and I think I mighta just liked it," punctuating her sincerity with one nod of her head.

We had been driving around sinuous mountain curves for about half an hour. Our ears had already popped, but those winding curves were not helping my stomach any.

Part of the time the roads were shaded by trees overhead and we could see small sections of a boulder-filled river flowing furiously black and frothy white at the bottom of the cliffs we passed. Then the view would clear and we could see west and look at the mountains we were approaching. The trees had already attained their most vivid and colorful appearance and it looked like God had laid a colorful patchwork quilt over them to keep them warm for the winter. Quilts like Aunt Siri and Grandma Jessie used to make when they were kids. I still had one that Grandma Jessie herself made when she was ten years old. My mother gave it to me when Grandma died eight years before.

"Oh, these mountains are so beautiful. You know Katherine, I used to tell Alph there was just nothing in Florida to compare to these mountains."

"Yes," my mother said, in slow and kind agreement.

By this time I had endured enough of my father's cigarette smoke and decided to quietly crack my window open. He didn't like the window open with the air conditioning on though, so I did it quietly.

Siri interrupted my renewed appreciation of clean air with a question. "So have you seen any young girls lately, Jimmy?"

"Nope," I said. "I'm hopin' I'll meet some in college next year." Then I knew what was coming next. Aunt Siri always did it.

"Well that's a shame. You're such a pretty boy." She reached over and started rubbing my hair back and forth with her hand. "Ain't he a pretty boy, Katherine? Looks just like you." She kept rubbing my head.

"Well, he must be if he looks like me," my mother said, with her characteristic chuckle, a sort of high-pitched "ha ha," not a knee slapping "ha ha," but a genteel, feminine "ha ha," that floated right to the top of the ceiling.

Siri kept rubbing my head.

"Ah, the boy's just a little backward," my father said. "I was that way too when I was young. Though I was gettin' over it by the time I was his age."

I took that remark as a partial reprieve in the conversation, as I usually did when he made similar remarks in my defense.

Siri finally stopped fumbling with my hair. I rubbed my fingers through it to straighten it out and thanked God that she didn't have the habit of pinching my cheek. I'd have blue marks all over my face by the time she let go of it.

"So how's Birdie?" my father asked. Birdie was Siri's second husband.

"Oh, he's just *fine*." said Siri, drawing the word "fine" out long and low.

Birdie was not well liked by the family. Not just because Siri's first husband, Alph, was such a great guy, which he was, and not just because Birdie was a witless, obnoxious jerk, which he was, but it was obvious to everyone but Aunt Siri that Birdie had only married her to get the money she and Alph had saved from owning a restaurant many years before.

I could see my mother wincing slightly at the thought of Birdie's existence. She recovered and asked in a suspicious tone, "Why couldn't he come with you?"

"I don't remember," said Siri, "probably had some business to attend to."

"Yeah, I'll bet," my mother said under her breath, as though she knew what "business" Birdie would be up to.

My mother told me the last time Birdie and Siri had visited that Birdie had given my sister a pinch on the butt and that she told him if he did it

again she'd tell Henry and Henry would beat the living shit out of him (which was the first time I knew of my mother using the word "shit" with the "i" in it; she usually just said, "sht," which, I figured, she didn't think was too unlady-like), but that she wouldn't tell Henry this time because Aunt Siri would find out.

Siri looked out the window awhile. Then she turned to me. "So what are you doing now, Jimmy? Have you gotta job?"

"No," I said. "I'm goin' to college this year."

"Oh, that sounds exciting! Where are you going?" she asked.

"Isothermal Community College. It's just a few miles away. I took electrical installation there last year, but I'm gettin' interested in some other things."

My father didn't say anything this time around. He just kept on driving. And he lit up another cigarette. He had not discovered my window was down yet, for I had pulled it down only a little so the whistle of air rushing out wasn't too loud.

"Well, I think that's something, Jimmy." Siri said. "You know, if I could do it all over again, I'd go to college. There's so many things to know." Then she turned to the window to stare at the ancient, weatherworn hills.

And I stared at her face, silhouetted by those hills. I remembered when I was six years old and my family went to Florida to spend a warm Christmas with Alph and Siri. My father sped down the two-lane road in our Ford Fairlane through darkness and light for ten hours to get to Orlando. My sister and I scrounged up against one another in the back seat, competing for sleeping space. My mother kept my father up with coffee and sandwiches, while she dozed between feedings. We came into town early in the morning and stopped by Alph and Siri's restaurant, for it was already open at six o'clock in the morning, serving truckers and early morning motorists on their way to work.

It was not a fancy restaurant but a small burger and fry stop that had the drive-in window on the side and the tall, blue-cushioned, rotating seats at the bar and the soda fountain and grill sitting visible right behind the counter, and the fluorescent lights in the early morning that gave it a strange mixed feeling of coziness and urgency. We all stepped up to the bar and everybody but me ordered bacon and eggs, for I was a hot dog man myself.

"We're just fixin' breakfast now, but I knew you'd be here Jimmy," Siri said, reaching beneath the counter, "so I got you a couple of dogs and fries and a chocolate milkshake right here." Siri knew my favorite combination. Then she took a couple of those tacky little white hats she and her cooks wore and slapped them on me and my sister's heads, and we all ate like hell.

I remembered other times there, in the summer, the evening sun shining low-angle beams of smoky yellow light into the screened-in porch. Alph's fat and friendly mass sitting and smoking Camels and my father smoking his Winstons and we listened to the radio to hear the reports of the daily war casualties. Then at night, watching *I Spy* on TV with the windows open and a cool breeze from the fan in the door filtering through the house which smelled like Siri's perfume mixed with sulphur water.

"Ya know, Katherine, I sure do love these mountains. I used to tell Alph how I missed them and I would come back to them someday."

"Yeah, they sure are pretty," my mother said, slowly and kindly.

I continued to watch Siri's face and the mountains beyond as they moved by. As I watched, the thought occurred to me that Siri, or some quality she had, was as permanent as the mountains we were driving past. But I couldn't quite figure out what that quality was. It was very spiritual in nature, and very lonely. It was the same feeling I got when I stared west after sunset on autumn evenings, when the air was sharp and dry, and Venus was a brilliantly glowing pearl set above the horizon.

There are three colors in the sky on those evenings: red, blue, and purple where the red and blue meet in the west above the horizon. I liked to stare at the purple and try to figure out where red became purple and purple became blue and why each color made me feel so different. And the feeling I would get while staring at the purple was that I was close to God without any effort at all. Like the sweet spot on a baseball bat, where, if the batter strikes the ball at that point on the bat, the ball will go the farthest distance without jarring the batter's hands.

Aunt Siri and the purple sky were like that to me. Looking at those two images made me feel close to the deepest reality of the world, without exerting any thought whatsoever.

In a terrible sense, Siri had truly become permanent. Through an unfortunate rolling of the genetic dice, she had acquired a disease in her old age that affected her short-term memory, leaving her unable to turn her present into a part of her past. The world of events along her horizon would pass by her, each event affecting her momentarily and then dying away, like a cool breeze on a hot day. All she could do was relive old memories, like watching old movie reruns in the absence of anything better.

We wondered about it sometimes. And I knew my mother worried about it. I saw her once sitting in the swing on our back porch on a summer afternoon with her Bible in her lap, and someone earlier that day had mentioned Aunt Siri and her sisters, Nell and Virginia, and their affliction. She sat there quietly and stared glaze-eyed out into the yard for a long time and watched

our dog, a collie named Booger, lounging on the grass under a tree as he sleepily awaited that heaven-bursting blast of rain and wind that every living being looked forward to on a burning summer afternoon.

We stopped at one of the little tourist traps along the road by a pretty little mountain called Chimney Rock to eat lunch. Siri stood for a moment near an old wooden park bench while she watched the river, which was flowing rapidly, cutting and spilling between large boulders. Then she moved near the edge. The water bubbled white in little dips and waves around the edges of the boulders and she watched the bubbles and stared at the trees up the small mountain across the river. My father walked up the gravel pathway leading to a little wooden shack that stood alongside the entrance to the park to pay for four hours of rental space. I was helping my mother set up a picnic dinner on the park bench.

We covered the bench top with a plain white tablecloth, and my mother proceeded to set food on it. There were tomatoes, mayonnaise, bread, potato chips, bottled cokes in a cooler, and some barbecued pork sandwiches we bought at a barbecue barn down the road.

After helping my mother just enough so I could claim I *had* helped, I walked over to join Aunt Siri.

"I tried to fish here a few times," I said.

"Did ya catch anything?" she asked.

"Na."

"I haven't been fishin' in years." Siri's head shook rhythmically, slowly, back and forth as she talked, keeping pace with her voice. "Me and Alph use to fish a lot a long time ago."

We were silent for a while.

"I think Daddy brought the fishin' rods and some lures if you wanna give it a try."

A smile cracked the lipstick on Siri's face. "Are ya'll gonna fish?! Oh, I haven't fished in years; not since me'n Alph fished together. Have you ever fished here before?"

"Yeah. Didn't catch anything though."

My father appeared at the campsite just as my mother finished setting the food on the table. He always timed that sort of thing well.

"Hey, Daddy, did you bring the fishin' rods?"

"Yeah I did; let me get 'um out." He opened the trunk of the car and got out the fishing gear.

"Ya'll ain't gonna fish before you eat are ya?" my mother asked.

"No, I'm just gettin' out the gear, Katherine," my father said, with impatient appeasement in his voice.

Siri walked toward the table. "Oh, I used to love to fish. In the summertime when we were kids, Daddy would take us all down to Broad River every Sunday afternoon after church. Did Jessie ever tell you about that, Katherine?"

"I believe she mentioned it a time'r two," my mother said as she sat down on the park bench.

"Oh, ya know back then me 'n Jessie 'n Nell 'n Ginny were all tomboys and we kept up with all the boys at school, especially at fishin'."

My mother smiled.

My father lit up a cigarette.

"I've fished in the Broad River *many a time*," my father said as he carefully leaned the rods against the car with his right hand and held the cigarette between the index and middle fingers of his left hand. "There's a lotta worms for bait along the bank." He flicked his cigarette, sending a chunk of ash to the ground. My father handled cigarettes beautifully. He flicked and puffed and held a cigarette so naturally and smoothly it made me want to take it up from time to time. Once, he let me try. It tasted terrible. The smoke lingered heavily in my throat for half an hour.

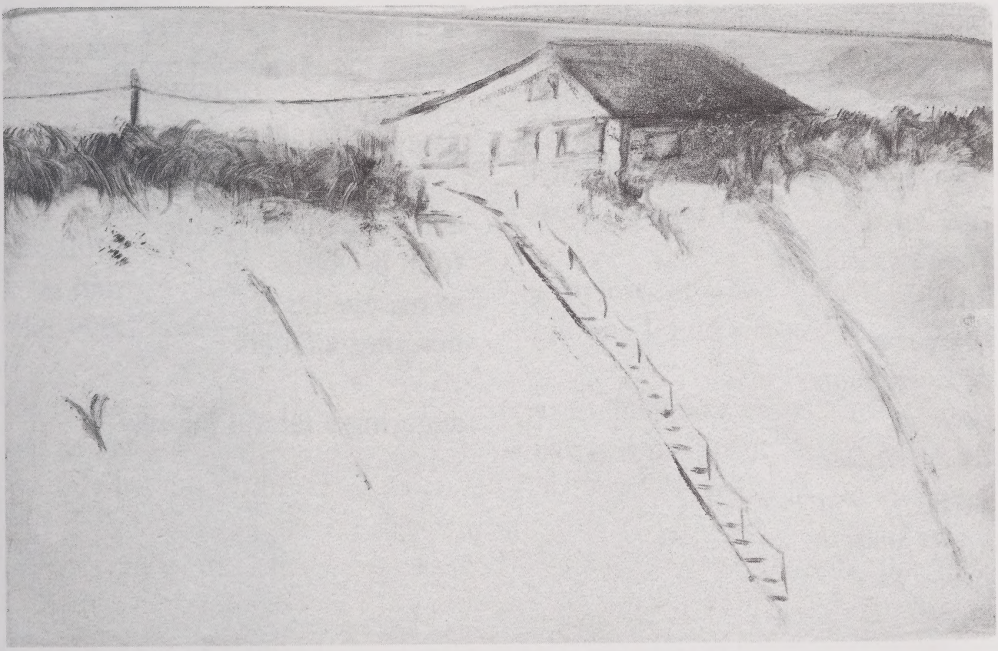
"Ya'll ready to eat?!" my mother exclaimed.

We gathered around the table and ate like hell.

* * *

We sat on a rock. Our fishing poles were deadly sticks of golden fire dangling before us in the cool autumn light. The river roared gently around us. Frothy white and gray waves of water curled gracefully around the sides of the boulders we sat on and dove into a trough in front of us. The river's voice was powerful, deep, soothing. The rocks remained calm within the turbulence. A sky frozen in cloudless blue sat between tall pines that shaped the mountains, and the river flowed inexorably toward the bottom of the sky. That blue washed through my mind like the water around the rocks.

Siri and I sat together, while my father sat fishing on a rock downstream, and my mother read a *Good Housekeeping* magazine in a lounge chair on the bank. I didn't know it then, but that trip to the mountains would be the last time I would spend with Aunt Siri. She would live another six years, but most of that time she would be in a nursing home, and I would be away at college. So when I think of her, that same image always comes to mind: sitting next to me and holding her fishing rod as steadily as possible, pasty red lips, those big old glasses, a slight palsy headshake, and one of the most infectious smiles I have ever known.



Drawing by Joan Worth

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Excerpts from a book in progress: *First Light*

First Light

Soft as smoke rising
she moves
transparent
in white nightgown
in first light
barefoot
along the trace
to the springhouse

lifts the latch
and takes
from its cool
haven
one print
of sweet butter
delicate
as the flower
perfectly imprinted
on its smooth
round face

Midwife

The first time
she lifts life
from the writhing chasm
of a dark, bloody womb

and hears the baby's cry
pierce the plundered room
she swoons
like a lover swoons

and the sweat dripping
from her brow
to her eyelids
becomes amulets

auguring a fateful journey

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Excerpts from a book in progress: *First Light*

In the Dark

"Like a fire in a dry thicket
Rising within women's eyes
Is the love men must return."
Louise Bogan

In the dark
in his arms
where the sunburn
and freckles
don't show

she flows
over him
like sweet honeysuckle

He tastes
her nectar

First Breath

". . . the yellow joy after the song of the sun."
Muriel Rukeyser

At the first inkling
of spring
when she opens up

snow dripping
from the tin roof

a divinity of white
glinting liquid silver sun

even the house gasps
to catch its breath . . .

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Excerpts from a book in progress: *First Light*

In the Winter

". . . salvation
is an enterprise, grace the bottom line."
Robert Wrigley

Snowbound
under the moonlight
the winter night
wears a blue shroud

In the house
bodies heave
under cold sheets . . .

At dawn she rises
and at the hearth
stirs banked fire
unearths glowing coals

breathes
blows on them
their fireplay
precious as jewels

an urgency
of heat and light

Mourning

3 a.m.
and she can't sleep . . .

The moon drifts
over the mountain

Only a quarter's worth
it sits on its side

lights her valley
with silken silver

glows to gold
her muslin gown

Her coverlet
comes alive

each quilted square
a field of its own

telling
another story . . .

The earth
trundles toward morning

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Excerpts from a book in progress: *First Light*

Diamondback:

a quarrel
of smoke

a coil
of rope

her hoe's
nosy poke

a rattle's
dry warning

a blurred
strike

a shivered
spine

a quicksilvered
slice

blood-
letting

writhing
till sunset

Spell of Rain

From her front porch
she sees
it coming . . .

Like a great
transparent snake
undulating

the rain carves
its wet white sign
across the mountain

walks a chalkline
through the valley
gathering force

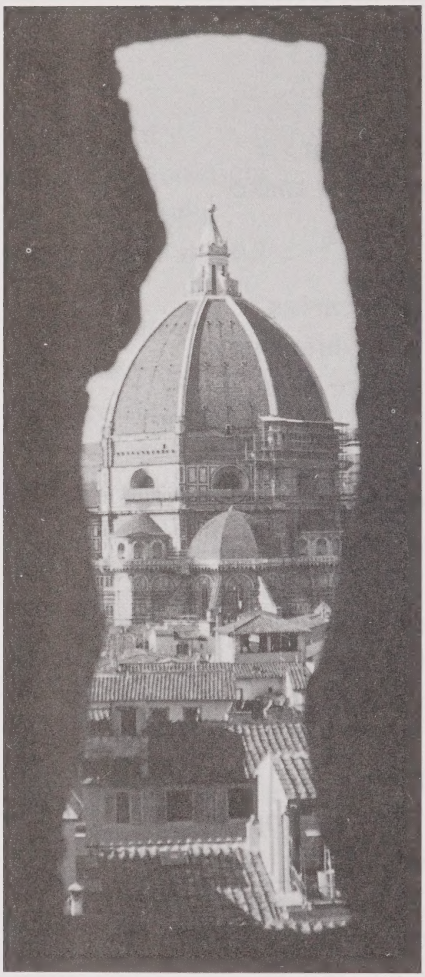
Then in a rumble
of thunder
and a flash of light

it drives
its first big drops home
like spikes

into her garden's flesh

Driving into the Night

Dara Llewellyn



I love
driving at night,
the road disappearing—
into darkness,
everything unknown.

The night
feels intimate.
Ensconced in the car,
I move through darkness,
alone, sheltered.

What lies ahead?

Rock slides in the road
just around a curve?
The road given way
over the river's edge?
Even a psychopath
thumbing a ride, smiling
in the light of an exit sign?

Lights glimmer ahead.
I steer over bumps,
around curves,
moving through the dark curtain,
a voice on the radio
telling me what a woman needs.

Where does the road lead?

Photo by John Bowers

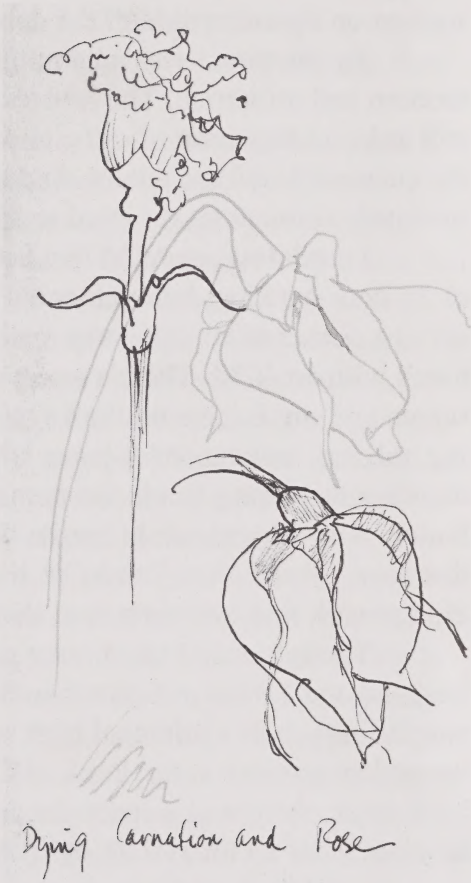
A friend's home—
just off the road,
a haven of comfort.
Or up a magical ramp—
another road, ending
wherever I want.

All possible paths
contained in the dark,
branches of riches,
opening into space.

I need only drive,
willing the night
to share—
its choices,
its enigmas.

I am free to drive.

The night beckons me on.



Drawing by Joan Worth

Banks

Lee Sokol

I love banks. This love started when I was four years old and went with my old maid aunt to withdraw money from her bank on Flagler Street in downtown Miami. I'm sure the hushed lobby was the most beautiful place I'd ever been, with its marble columns and vaulted ceilings. I stood silently by as my aunt dealt with the lovely, polite woman on the other side of the decorative brass grillwork

By the time I was an adult, bank architecture had become more modern and utilitarian. The lobbies no longer felt like cathedrals. But I still enjoyed the sense of order and decorum in the transactions between the customers and the tellers. And then Automatic Teller Machines were invented, eliminating the need to speak to a teller.

I can't love an ATM like I do a bank. I appreciate the convenience of 24-hour banking, but who could love that drab little monolith sitting off in a corner of an ugly strip mall parking lot? And there's no personal touch with an ATM. There's a sort of dialog between the words on the screen and my fingers on the keypad, but it isn't personal. No teller smiling, talking, making small jokes with me. Though I sometimes feel there's a tiny being inside the monolith who chuckles if I push a wrong button. And who certainly laughs disdainfully as I read the slip of paper that says "Insufficient Funds." A live teller would soften that blow with a kind remark that everyone does that sometime.

Though once I had a very personal relationship with an ATM. My husband and I lived in Colombia, South America, for two years while I taught English in a bilingual high school. Shortly after moving there, we opened an account at the Bank of Colombia. On the inside cover of the bank book, there was a space for an invisible signature which could only be seen under an ultraviolet light. A few months after we opened our account, the Bank of Colombia instituted Automatic Teller Machines. On my summer off, my husband and I traveled around Colombia by bus for several weeks. We took our ATM card, but not my bank book. I left the bank book safely in our apartment in case we lost the ATM card while traveling. (Or were pickpocketed—an expected occurrence in Bogota, but one which we didn't suffer.) After a couple of weeks on the road we ran low on cash, so we went to an ATM. The ATM was out of service because transit workers were on strike that week and had not delivered the stacks of crisp bills necessary in an ATM. The ATM was just outside

the bank itself, so we went inside to get cash. The teller could not give me any cash because I didn't have my bank book with the invisible signature. I explained that I had left the book safely in my apartment while traveling since I had an ATM card. Didn't the ATM card show that I had an account with the Bank of Colombia? But the ATM card would only work in the machine, she said. We looked at each other for a few minutes, both trying to think of a solution. Then she said for me to go back outside to the ATM machine and she would send a woman to hand feed bills through the machine. So I put in my card, punched the numbers, and a woman on the other side of the machine fed the bills through to me one by one, both of us chatting the whole time. There I was, having my first conversation with an ATM.

The most personal service I ever received in a bank was while I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand. This was before ATMs, so I had to go inside the bank and get cash from tellers, which sometimes meant standing in long lines. A lovely young Thai woman who was a junior officer in the bank noticed me (the tall white woman in line with all the Thais) and offered to give me personal service. She said she would keep my bank book locked in her desk drawer and I could always come straight to her instead of standing in line. I felt a bit guilty about getting preferred service just because I was a *farang*, but I knew that it would be rude to turn down her nice offer. So she became my personal contact in the bank. We enjoyed talking with each other and the arrangement worked fine. Until the Friday I went to withdraw quite a bit of money for a month-long trip to do a project at the other end of Thailand. She wasn't there that day; she was on vacation. My bank book was locked safely in her drawer, but no one could open the drawer. How was I to get money for my trip? I went to ask another bank officer for help. He suggested we get a locksmith. The two of us walked down the street to a locksmith's shop, explained the problem, and returned to the bank with the locksmith. The locksmith opened the drawer, gave the bank officer my bank book, and I got my money.

I've never had bad service at a bank in the United States, but somehow I can't imagine a bank officer here volunteering to get a locksmith to break into another officer's desk. Or a human being on the other side of the ATM, feeding the bills through by hand. I'm not sure we're ready here for such personal and creative problem solving.

Drawing by Shirley Lyon Garcia

Pat's World

Amy Knight

My friend Ally and I had an interesting conversation about what our children would be like. We decided that her child would be really laid back, say things like "dude," and possibly be a little slow mentally due to Ally's own mind-expanding extracurricular "activities." While laughing, she said that my child would be named Pat, like the character Pat on *Saturday Night Live* whose gender is ambiguous. The other characters in Pat's skits ask rude questions and invade Pat's personal space in attempts to glean information about what gender Pat is. Ally apparently thinks that I would try to have a gender-free child. Our conversation ended with a guffaw as we plotted how our hypothetical children would interact with each other. Even though I don't really want to have or raise children, I've found myself thinking about Pat and daydreaming about the kind of environment that I'd like Pat to grow up in. I imagine a society in which children explore and understand social construction, how people experience difference and how this difference is celebrated.

In this place, pale pink and pale blue are nothing more than the colors of cotton candy and the kids think that painting each other's toenails with purple glitter polish is just as fun as the big, red Tonka truck. My child Pat would not be seen as the threat or freak that the *Saturday Night Live* character is. Even more ideally, all the children would be gender-free. None of them would be trying to be "tough guys" and none would be told to "straighten up and act like little ladies." But, if Pat chose to wear Pat's hair in braids it would be okay. Pat's friends would say, "cute hair," and mean nothing more than, "cute hair." Pat would be unmarked. None of the adults would worry about the children being trapped by patriarchal ideals. Patriarchy wouldn't exist. Pat would not be sized up because of clothes, make-up (or lack of it) and Pat could accessorize without being thought of as pleasing someone else. If by some chance of nature Pat were born intersexed, there would be a doctor advising me to let Pat grow into whatever Pat's body decides. There would be no "surgical shoehorn" molding Pat's developing body to fit either side of the dichotomy (Fausto-Sterling 1993:91). The binary would have dissolved and science would "permit ambiguity" (Fausto-Sterling1993:91). Like the berdache[1], Pat would be celebrated. It would be understood that Pat was made by nature and nature is not to be questioned. This differs from the present practice of repairing nature's "mistakes" by science.

None of Pat's friends and schoolmates would be ashamed of modest homes or dirty old sneakers because families would have their needs taken care of. There would be no capitalists holding down parents' wages because of their own profits. In this society, members could honestly regard their interests "as the true interests of the whole society" because it would be representative of those looking out for their fellow-persons (Gilbert 1998:5). Members' realities would not be so totally removed from each other. Policy makers wouldn't dare toss around nine- and ten-digit figures about budgeting space travel programs without keeping in mind that children's education is a priority on the list of goals for society. No one's "security of their families or community depends on the oppression of others" (Allison 1993:271). No one has to have lives that "are mean and horrible" in order for someone else to live the good life (Allison 1993:271).

I envision a school with students who will look in their history books and think of the practices of class stratification, racism, sexism, and homophobia like we look at the medieval practices of bloodletting barbers. Just as the barbers were unaware of the way bodies work, "isms" will be seen as a result of not knowing how society works. Historical stigmatization on the basis of traits will be looked at with awe and students will understand society's past as being filled with ignorance. As the students flip throughout the text, they will be aware that this one book cannot give voice to the multiplicity of difference. They will realize that this is only one piece of people's heritage and past and know that this book's lessons are not supposed to reinforce privilege or guilt. This school will provide an environment in which students will not have to be "afraid of their own ignorance" (Tatum 2002:116). Children will not hesitate about asking questions about each other's experiences. They will question each other out of genuine interest and not the attempt to find some essential difference. Learning will be a process of recognizing the importance of group differences which leads to pride and understanding of experience as something that is not a universal experience (Kerchis & Young 1995). Children will be open about their families and the different shapes they take. Andy may have two moms while Jamie only lives with one dad. They will be proud of their parents and will be taught that love takes many different forms.

I see this school as a part of the future. These children will know that they can grow up to be anything and for them "anything" will not include the option to become a corporate CEO that ignores damage to community, families, or the environment in order to make profits.

"Anything" will not include plastic surgeons specializing in aesthetic breast augmentation or nose jobs. And, "anything" will not mean being a professional football star who is valued more than educators. This generation of children will have respect for one another. They will be allies and know to "look at…personal and social resources, evaluate the environment" they are helping "to create and decide what needs to be done" to make it better (Kivel 2002:127). Feagin and Vera (2002:125) write about moving toward an anti-racist Unites States by integrating "courses of oneness of all humankind" into educational systems. This is what I wish for Pat.

Endnote

1. The berdache tradition is diverse among Native American tribes. Those whose gender is androgynous have an accepted social status and important roles in many aspects of Native American life. For more information about the religion and ceremony surrounding berdaches see Walter L. Williams essay, "The Berdache Tradition," in in *The Meaning of Difference: American Constructions of Race, Sex and Gender, Social Class, and Sexual Orientation*, 2nd ed, ed. By Karen E. Rosenblum and Toni-Michelle C. Travis. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000.

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Main Street

Julia Nunnally Duncan

I come this evening to listen,
not to comment
or gain particular wisdom
from what I hear;
just to be—
perhaps to absorb aromas of coffee
taste sweetness of chocolate;
let my eyes peer
through the tall arched window
of this restored hotel
down onto Main Street,
once so familiar to me
and my kin;
I might see
a recognized face,
feel my youthful joy again
at being here
though I doubt it.
My residence now is farther
from this spot
than in years past,
so I don't rest here often.
But I have history here
in this hometown—
(Oh, how I trod barefoot
these streets in summer—
does anyone remember?)
—though this place's
home in my heart and mind
is vague now.
I will hear your words,
my poet friends,
but remain as ghostly
as the old stores
of this town's past—
the Roses five and dime,
with its aroma of fried hamburgers
wafting from the lunch counter
and noises of happy children
tromping down the long stairs

to aisles of toys
and tropical birds in cages,
exotic fish in aquariums;
the Belks department store
with displays of Sunday hats
and fragrant perfumes,
Boy Scout uniforms and men's tweed suits;
its bargain basement housing
old women's cotton dresses
and underwear;
work pants and work shoes
for the farmers and
textile and furniture hands;
and all the other
clothes stores
and shoe stores
and furniture stores
and hardware stores
and drug stores
and music stores,
all proud with
their carved moldings
and engraved metal ceilings,
polished hardwood or shiny vinyl floors,
and porcelain or crystal chandeliers
(alive with eager weekend shoppers)—
now lost except in the
memories of aging children
who once roamed the streets on Saturday
or in recollections in
fading minds of aged parents
who recall an even more glamorous
town of the 30's and 40's—
or settled with minds
closed forever in the dust of
graves at Oak Grove or
Memorial Park or
scores of little churchyards.

So forgive me if I have
nothing much to offer this evening
beyond this poem,
while I sit here and rest
and remember.

On the Rag

Bonnie Temple Cassara

I am a ragged, raggedy woman
Ragtime in my voice
Ragamuffin in my soul
Don't rag on me, not you too.
My man, my man, he say
I acts like I'm on the rag all the time:
But I say...

Listen to the rag in my voice.
Listen to the wolf, listen to the howl,
To the raw that travels on the edges
On the god forbidden edges
Of my words, of my song
Of my sweet, sweet soul
As it sings in added time.

So I tells my man—
I'll claim my rag bag and all
Those rag tag odds and loose ends,
All those unfinished pieces of myself,
And me, raggedy woman,
I will make a freedom ladder
And I will climb that
Raggedy, baggedy, raggedy, taggedy ladder
Right out my window
To my freedom.

And the stars in the starry night
Will stretch out their arms to me
'Cause they know I'm jus' mos' like them.
And the cities and the streetlights
And the grass and all them otherwise things
Will do the same

And this raggedy, baggedy,
Raggedy, taggedy ragamuffin woman
Will climb out that window
On her rag ladder
With all rag tag odds and loose ends of herself,
Every loose end flappin' in the wind
Precious, alive and free.

With no shame, with no fear
Saucy and smilin'
Knowing that ragtime
Is often just the best of times
And knowing those outstretched arms
In the sky and in the ground in the middle
—They wait for raggedy woman.

Drawing by Bonnie Temple Cassara

The Adjunct's Cycle

Gigi Derballa

Hurrying down the highway, hauling ass
Just trying to make it to my six o'clock class,
I'm a traveling teacher with an office in my trunk
Packed with books, pens, papers, and other junk
August's phone never stopped ringing for fall;
Now, I teach at three schools with ten classes in all.

So for now the bills will be paid
Though I question the choices I've made
With all the students I feel I must reach
I wonder how well I really do teach
So many papers and lessons to prepare
Maybe the students think I don't care.

December begins in a frenzy and ends with a break
But soon I've had all the holiday I can take.
Time off without pay isn't so great;
Now all my bill paying will be late.
I start with eight classes, but two don't make
My creditors will be calling to see if there's a mistake.

Late winter is the time for fever and cough,
And I watch my colleagues rush their children off
To the dentists and doctors and pharmacies galore,
Yet when my family is sick or feeling kinda sore
Unless it's some illness quite rare
We find relief with Bismol and Bayer.
Without insurance, doctors are too expensive
So with herbals and vitamins we go on the defensive.

By spring the full-timers go on trips
Conferences and workshops full of teaching tips.
I watch with envy for I wish I could go
Because I'm part-time, the answer's always "no,
It's not in our budget, maybe next year."
My God, I ask, what am I doing here?

By April I panic, no classes in sight
How'll I get through summer; will it be all right?
Maybe I should look for a job more stable
Yet leaving the classroom I love...I'm not sure I'm able.
Even though academia is my life,
Why must it be filled with such strife?
I borrow and beg and do what I can;
I'll pay back in the fall and start the cycle again.

Drawing by Joan Worth

They Won't Take 14-Year-Olds

Sandi Goodridge

Lisa Johnson told me in the copy room. I was hurriedly trying to finish some copies for my half-prepared creative writing students. "What do you think is going on?" she asked, frowning. "Oh, I'm just making some last minute copies," I chattered. "You know, the more creative the mind, the less organized." "No, I mean in New York," she looked for some recognition in my eyes. "Been here since 7:30, and we still don't get the Asheville paper or any local TV channels up on our mountain...what is it?"

Two concise sentences later, I was wobbling back down the hall with my copies. *Do I tell this class? What do I tell them? How will I, they, we handle it?*

I didn't want to risk making a big deal in case it was a hoax of some sort. So I dashed into my office and called my husband thinking the police detective should know. When I finally got through, Tim mumbled something about a terrorist named Bin Laden, "you know, the same one connected with the attempted attack on the Trade Center back in '93." "Oh yeah," I lied. "Wait a minute, the towers are going down!" he screamed into the phone. "I'll call you back."

No chance of a false alarm now, but I'm not good at split-minute decisions. What if I pretend I know nothing? At least they'll have two and one-half more hours of a normal Tuesday morning class.

So we shared our writings, talked about ideas for field trips. And I thought about how bad things might just get and how I loved this classroom full of people. For once, Creative had more than a handful, and not a sour grape among them. We sometimes read or talked through break time and got so involved in somebody's work that we forgot when class was over. They had things to contribute, things to share, and they were supportive of each other.

Photo by Rebecca Davis

And what a wide range of people! The whole universe right in one classroom: old, young, mature, admittedly immature, wise, experienced, naive, and beautiful. I wondered how they would react when they left the room and if they would be angry at me for not telling.

My own children say I'm too protective. I have always admired innocence, and some of these fragile adult children have had theirs jerked away from them far too early. I don't want to contribute to the overwhelming sense of fatalism students seem to catch like colds. Will they forgive me for covering their eyes for two and one-half little hours when I could have turned on the TV?

Lord, I hate television! We talked lightly about materialism and what a difference in the gap between "haves" and "have-nots" there seems to be. I thought of what little I knew about Osama Bin Laden. Wealthy, radical religious zealot who is jealous of our land; he'd really found our Achilles' heel. But I couldn't do it; I couldn't tell them.

Two minutes later it seemed, the class was over. Several students hung out for questions or advice. And then they were all gone without a clue. *Grief! I won't see them for a whole week, and who knows what will have happened by then? What a dummy I was not to tell them!* As I looked out the window which usually shows a crowd of folks around the commons area, I was reminded that I'd better go pick up my youngest at the local high school.

My last child, my last connection to innocence, Cory doesn't need any more trauma in his life even at 14. He's seen more dead people than *The Sixth Sense*. I watched him bounding out the door, talking full speed, telling me even more than I had found out from listening to the news on the way. "You should have seen that second one hit the tower! Wow! And people running around; they got some good close-ups of dead people too." He told me every single teacher let them watch. And his ROTC instructor said that plenty of people would be signing up for the military in the very near future. But they won't take 14-year-olds. It was going to be an important trip home for mom and son...thank God it takes so long to get up the mountain.

Carolyn Pidgeon

Dragonfly

Lonely,
the sound
of a dragonfly's wings,
scouting for mosquitoes
in the still
morning swamp
when the night sounds
sleep.

Ideas

Ideas,
Pure and hard as raisins,
No longer plump and juicy
as when first plucked
from the vine,
Staining our dreams purple

Irresponsibility

My life contained
in parentheses
doing what is expected and right
while others escape
and ramble with no thought:
run-on sentences
that leave confusion and mayhem
leaving me and others
to pick up the fragments
and make sense of them.
And then
to bind the wounds inflicted
by the broken pieces.

To Helen

Once a year we wrote
Christmas letters, hand-written
not the reproducible kind.
Stories of your husband
chasing a neighbor's recalcitrant bull
from your friendly pasture,
worrying he was working too hard.
Visiting successful children
who lived too far,
new grandbabies you longed to hold
suddenly gone off to college

Eyes going bad
but still seeing the moon glow
over the hayfield and the new
schoolhouse
in a town that was always yours.

In twenty years
I never saw you.
My paths never passed
your front porch.
Yet countless times
I sat in your linoleumed kitchen
by the brown metal stove
sharing cake or cobbler
while the big collie dog
barked at the screen door...
talking about children and roses.

Drawing by Joan Worth

Skin Deep

Gerald A. Metz

I

There was something about Doris's skin that reminded me of the wallpaper in Granny's bedroom, only her skin was more interesting to look at. With sunlight shining brightly into it, a random pink stippling glowed from deep inside. I imagined what it would feel like to touch that skin, but I knew touching was forbidden and she wouldn't understand it if I did, and I also knew I was in love with Doris and that the folks thought it was amusing when I said so at the dinner table.

"Doris?" they smiled. "Doris what?"

"Schlossberg," I said, and their amusement bumped up the scale another notch though they tried to hide it and I couldn't see what was so funny. Back then I didn't know what a WASP was even though theoretically I was one.

My seat was near the window, and hers was just to my right, so in the morning when the sun streamed into our first grade classroom it always made her skin do that mottled thing. I had to watch out of the corner of my eye so she wouldn't know. I thought of asking some of the other kids if they had noticed Doris's skin, but I had the feeling they would just sit there and look at me so I never said anything.

II

Starting around eighth grade it took courage to look at myself in the mirror. There was always one on my nose, or next to it, "plain as the nose on your face," which, in my case, gave it star billing. By the time I was done with the damned prescription soap that smelled like my old chemistry set, it was time for a tactical appraisal that included some tentative squeezes to see which ones might be ripe for picking. After pinging a few cores off the mirror, I'd be on a roll and invariably try to gut one that wasn't ready to go and I could see I was going to be stuck with a nasty zit the size of a nickel for days or even a week or two, so why couldn't I just quit while I was ahead? My clinical hunches were getting better but I was so fascinated by the possibility of a successful squeeze that I took too many chances. I

made careless mistakes like using a hairpin or a paper clip to attack a blackhead that still had a red ring around it, as if I didn't know by now to wait for the color to fade before pressing it out. As a result I'd get stuck with an Olympic hard splotch that felt like a sore B-B under the surface and took a week for the color to fade. The hardness took even longer. It wasn't like I could make one disappear just by emptying it. I don't know why I squeezed the ones that weren't really ripe: it was like eating peanuts—which, of course, I couldn't do any more. Or chocolate—like swearing off made any difference. I'd tear off a couple of squares of toilet paper and put pressure on the worst of the bleeding zits with one hand, tidying up the bathroom mirror with the other. I was tired of hearing complaints about that messy mirror. Big sin. Like leaving the seat up.

The face fuzz was another problem. Whether it was better to use my new Remington, in which case I should remember to shave before picking my pimples to avoid getting blood and ooze into the razor...or to give up and use a Gillette blade and do a better job with the whiskers but end up shaving the high spots off the worst of the eruptions, creating oozers that would need pressure all through breakfast just to stop the bleeding. If shaving the heads off would have killed the dumb things, I could have stood it—heck, I'd have preferred it!—but it just added to the general mess and didn't make Mom any happier.

She never said much, but as I strolled quietly into the kitchen she'd shoot me an anxious glance and I'd see the lines thicken between her eyebrows; her cheeks and lower lids would ride up into a squinting disapproval that was pain or pity or probably a bit of both. Her glance hit me and bounced back like pus off the mirror and I felt ashamed and helpless. I wished I could say, "I'm still me," even though I didn't look like me any more, and I'd have done anything to make it all different and I know she would have, too, but we couldn't and we both knew that. The few times we broke silence we ended up hurting each other. She'd make a remark about wishing I wouldn't come to the breakfast table with a fresh-squeezed face, but I'd just grunt because it wasn't funny any more.

Then she got the idea maybe the Mayo Clinic could clear up my skin. The Mayo Clinic, for god's sake! That made me feel like an even bigger freak but off I went for a week of hot sulfur compresses and big doses of vitamin A and "acne surgery," nothing more than their attempt to squeeze my zits with fancier equipment that didn't do any better than I could with my own two fingers. Experience counts for something in

this world after all, and I knew my own skin better than they did out in Minnesota. Struck out. Still spotted. I flew back home and as I met her, Mom's face showed she had expected better of me. There were people watching us, but I broke the teen-age taboo and hugged my mother: I needed to know she'd hug back, that I was not a leper after all, and besides if my head was buried on her shoulder she couldn't see my face. Her skin, unscarred, was so soft and warm!

III

It had seemed like a good idea, but the business of going to the dance dressed as a clown was turning out to be a triumph of technology over common sense, and I was starting to feel sick inside. Clearly I'd overplayed my hand and I felt more hollow with every wrong guess my high school classmates made. It was bad enough to be a nerdy geek in class, but here at the gym I was surrounded by fraternity jocks and cheerleaders as they inspected my blinking nose, droopy rubber ears and oversized feet. They called out the names of the "in" crowd, trying to guess who could possibly be tucked inside such an improbably zany outfit, and I started to imagine their disappointment when I would finally unmask and they would see that it was only me. By the end I was feeling like a bigger clown than the one I was trying to portray.

I had considered putting on clown makeup instead of wearing a mask, which would have had the indirect advantage of covering my zits and acne scars but I chucked that idea on the grounds that the oily makeup might start a plague of pus even more repulsive than usual. Maybe I was afraid that the traditional red clown spots on a greasy white background would not be sufficiently different from my usual carbuncular appearance to constitute any kind of disguise. I finally convinced myself that a mask was the best platform for the blinking nose light I had made in Electrical Shop, and everything else followed from that.

Now I'd have to face the music, which was past the crescendo of wrong guesses, and the pace of possibilities was petering out like the sound a popcorn popper makes near the end of a batch. They never did guess my name, and when the mask finally came off a few said, "Oh..." and turned away, eager to guess the identity of newer and more important arrivals. I also turned away. And learned my place. As if I hadn't already known. How could I have been such a fool?

But even fools have dreams, and here I was at the Halloween dance with the star of my nocturnal fascinations, Judy Januszczyk. In my mind I could relive every encounter, every scrap of conversation, every accidental meeting in the hall, even the way my arm felt when hers brushed up against me that one time when we were in the cafeteria line. Electricity! I didn't have the nerve to sit with her and if I had I'd have been mute.

Her family was Polish, one of many that had come to the Triple Cities to work at Endicott Johnson years ago. As far as I knew she was Catholic, which only added to the mystery and the appeal though I wasn't sure why. Maybe it was because her ethnicity and religion kept her out of the WASP clique that also excluded me for reasons I couldn't fathom but had sorrowfully accepted. I had the hope that our shared alienation from the beautiful people might make her more attainable, and on that score I had a very active imagination. I savored another replay of that time her arm touched mine and marveled again at its incandescent impact: I had marked the spot with a pen and avoided washing it for at least two weeks. By then the ink had faded but not the memory.

She sat two rows in front of me in home room and one row to the right, a knight's move in chess, and that gave me the chance to worship her left cheek, the upper part of her left ear where it sometimes showed between the strands of her silky black hair and, if her elbows weren't on the desk, her budding left breast. I would come to class early in hopes of having enough time to study Judy and savor the churning warmth it generated deep in my belly.

It must have been masochism that made me ask her to go with me to the dance, but I pushed myself and braced for rejection. She said Yes! I was stuck for the next line of dialogue: my tongue completely disconnected from my brain and the furious realization that I was coming across as even more of a nerd than usual did nothing to get it going again.

And now here we were at the dance. What next? I had developed a good memory for sensual encounters but the art of seduction hadn't kicked in yet: I didn't have a clue how to fulfill the promise of an evening that had seemed so magical in my imagination but so threatening at close range.

The shoe polish for my new white bucks reminded me of the milky acne medicine I daubed with dutiful optimism on my face at bedtime every night. I had painted a fresh coat of polish on the shoes being

careful not to smudge any on the red rubber edges of the soles, but I hadn't tried to dance with shoes that wanted to stick to the hardwood floor of the gym, and my tongue was as immobilized as my feet. True, I was getting a chance to put an arm around Judy and to hold her hand, and that let a strange joy percolate through my body at the same time it made the whole setting more desperate. I was dressed like a fool, and I felt like one.

The evening was a farce. No goodnight kiss. We never went out again. I never forgot her.

IV

epidermis pl. *epider'mides* [MeSH: Epidermis] the outermost and nonvascular layer of the skin, derived from embryonic ectoderm, varying in thickness from 0.07 to 0.12 mm, except on the palms and soles where it may be 0.8 and 1.4 mm, respectively.

Dorland's Medical Dictionary

My name echoes in the hospital corridors. "Report to the ER."

I'm the AR on this shift, the Assistant Resident in General Surgery. I'm hot stuff and I know it. The nurses know it, too. They follow my orders, tune in to my mood, and smile when I look up and see them watching me. I'm batting .500: for every one who turns down an invitation to sneak into the Staff House after hours, there's another one who will. I feel like I own the place, maybe because I'm here almost all the time. Literally a resident.

My white coat whooshes down the halls. The patient is a senior from Syracuse who was sliding down an icy hill on a piece of cardboard with some sorority sisters when she ran over something sharp embedded in the ice and it slashed open her jeans and about three inches of her left bun. Her big eyes are red, but the tears have dried on her high cheek bones. Classic skull. Stunning symmetry. The record says she's from Vestal. Name is Januszczyk. Small world! With that name she's got to be Judy's little sister. I didn't even know Judy *had* a little sister! I nod politely and introduce myself.

I consider what suture might be adequate to the challenge of restoring that slashed surface, mooning at me like half of a sliced melon laid drippy-side down. I choose 5-0 nylon and a running subcuticular stitch, not only because it'll give the best result but because it'll take about three times as long to place as interrupted

sutures, and she'll have to come back so I can take them out. I'll schedule her to return Saturday afternoon.

While I'm calculating all this I'm shooting in the 2% Lidocaine and prepping the skin with pHisoHex on a saline-soaked four by four. Start at the wound edges and work outward, scrubbing in a spiral, slowly. Now another sponge, and do it again. Bubbles appear in the blob of thick white cream I'm spreading over her skin, her sacred skin, her wonderful warm resilient skin that moves round and round with the friction of my sponge; back and forth it complies yet pushes against me with a gelatinous resistance that makes me lose track of time. My ears ring. Have I prepped enough? Probably too much. I can't let her realize that.

I put on sterile gloves and take the folded green drape off the top layer of the suture tray that's balanced at elbow height on a nearby Mayo stand and fluff open the drape and drop it onto the summit of the lovely mound of her poor split gluteal epidermis, the sheet rising like a curtain, neatly framing the stage where my next act will take place, a solo performance. No audience: just the two of us, thinking our own thoughts, my mind falling into the groove of a role I've played so often this semester I can do it in the middle of the night, again and again, without fatigue, and she, lying there, not knowing quite what to expect, her face turned away from me, the crest of her ear cutting through the straight blackness of her hair, the contours of her thorax retreating into the mattress: a goddess, perfection personified except for the dripping gash that cries out for my healing touch.

As I reach for the toothed forceps and needle holder every *erector pili* muscle in my forearms tightens and goose bumps rise as a wave of unaccustomed exultation sweeps over the entire extent of my skin. I am almost paralyzed in the grip of glory and it's obvious I need to say something casual to divert the headlong rush of this strange stream.

"Januszczyk." I say. "You from Vestal?"

"Yeah. How'd ya know?"

"Judy. I was in her class."

Of Kites and Dreams

Margaret Darnell

My dreams are kites in the strong March breeze;
They rise and soar whenever I please.
They dip and tip as the wind zips past.
Are they strong and sturdy enough to last,
To weather the blasts of stormy gales,
To endure the lull of Life's delay?
No, I must firmly clutch the strings
Or else my dreams will slip away!

Drawing by Joyce Dover

Killer Rolls

Charles DeVries

Racing from the cramped car across sunbaked grass and sand, into that memory-evoking aroma of my grandmother's kitchen.

The smell of cinnamon rolls from the oven, as well as the lingering sense of many batches of French bread.

My small hands tired after the mixing and the kneading, yet captured by the feel of the dough and the magic of the creation.

With the crackling of the cooling bread, I was awakened to the uncontrollable desire to break open a loaf and take in the pungent earthiness.

I was transformed into another world, leaving me in awe of the power of the senses.

• • •

With all that is going on, nobody is going to notice that another cinnamon roll will be missing. The grown-ups are trying to get some sort of consensus of where we are off to: the ocean or the ponds. Big decision to make when you are on vacation.

There goes another roll; they go down too easy when they just come out of the oven. My mother says Grandmere shouldn't be doing all this baking; maybe she's right....No way! This one has to be disguised; just close your mouth when you see someone, then chew real fast. Everyone is piling into cars, heads are counted . . . one more. . . .

I never believed anyone when they said you had to wait after you eat to go swimming. My father pulled me out after I doubled up and started floating in the water.

They sure did taste good....

Drawing by Joan Worth

She

Thomas Gore

She's taking him upstairs. Now.

My knuckles burn white around the steering wheel. My heart slams at my temples. Tremors begin in my arms, and I close my eyes, push the memories away.

I am in control.

I take a deep breath and open my eyes.

Looking up, I watch as the lights come on in her apartment on the second floor. Two silhouettes move behind the thin curtains, touching hands, arms, lips. My eyes drift closed.

I am in control.

I touch the gun in my belt, stab the cigarette out into the tray and step out of the car. This neighborhood threatens me. Its eyes bore into my back. The buildings jut from the ground like rotted teeth, and the street lamps do little to lift the darkness. Shudders break out across my spine.

I am in control.

I slam the door behind me and cross the street. Overhead, the lights dim in her window and I feel my fists clenching.

There have been so many now, but there will be no more. I will make certain of that.

The door squeals in protest as I push it open. I step across the threshold and my knees grow weak. Stale sweat and urine assault my nostrils, and I cover my mouth and nose with my hand and try not to retch. Voices seep from behind closed door: moans, cries, a television, maybe. Farther down the hall, a man glares at me, unblinking.

He is unimportant. I am here only for her. The years have been so long, and she must be made to understand. I will make her remember, before she dies.

I climb the darkened stairwell and swallow through my tightened throat. My stomach clenches with every step I take. My heart pounds as I reach the landing, where a naked yellow bulb casts shadows into corners.

I lean against the wall, close my eyes, and take several deep breaths. I remember the first one, and I remember what she did to him.

I am in control.

I squeeze the bridge of my nose and wipe the sweat from my forehead before opening my eyes. There, across the landing, is her door. I hear the ragged breath in my throat as I sidestep the rotting floorboards to lean my ear against the door. I hear muffled thumps, lilting laughter, and my eyes flutter closed.

Her face is so clear in my mind. Her eyes, her hair, her smile … made up for all of them. Such a waste.

My knees seem to liquefy, and my hands tremble. I press my eyes with my thumbs and dissolve her image into fading sparks.

I am in control.

Gently, I turn the doorknob, but find it locked. I glance over my shoulder to see if I am alone and pull the wire from my pocket. It slips easily into the lock, and I lean forward, licking the sweat from my upper lip. I squeeze the knob and jiggle the wire, trying to absorb the sounds with my hand. The quiet snick is as loud as a gunshot in my ears.

My pulse beats at my temples as I count the seconds until I hear laughter again. A held breath escapes me.

I nudge the door open far enough to peer inside.

Shadows dance across the wall as candles flicker. I hear giggling and moaning, and I know it is she. Incense hangs pungent in the air, trying to cover another scent. Something all too familiar.

I take the gun from my belt, inhale deeply, try to ignore my pounding heart, count to three, and crash the door open with my shoulder as I raise the gun. The shadows on the wall stop their dance.

Both are on the bed, frozen. The blood appears black in the dim light, and binding his wrists to the frame is black electrical tape. His head hangs back, his mouth hangs open, and his eyes stare without seeing at the ceiling.

I remember the others, their faces skinned away, their chests puckered with wounds, the same grisly signature carved into the skin. Every one of them tied. Every one of them him.

I remember the captain telling me it was over, that I was off the case because I was getting too close. Letting her interfere.

I remember my brother's face. Hanging from the wall.

I am in control.

She's screaming now, charging me with the knife above her head. I yell at her to give it up and begin to pull the trigger as I step back. Wood splinters, a sharp pain shoots up my leg, the gun fires, and I hear glass shatter somewhere across the room. I stumble, and the gun clatters across the floor. I look at the body on the bed and know what it will look like without a face.

Her eyes gleam with fury, and I struggle to keep her gnashing teeth from my face. Blood shines on her pale skin, pink foam drips from her mouth, and she snarls. She kicks my ankle, pain fires up my leg, and my hand slips. She raises the knife. Again.

And again.

I am in control.

Illumination

Diana LaSpada

An angel came and swept
a lava finger 'cross the lake,
sprinkling drops of melted sunshine
upon a choppy wake.

A summer mallard waded
into the sifted light
and for a mystic moment
was completely lost from sight.

Acrylic painting by Diana LaSpada

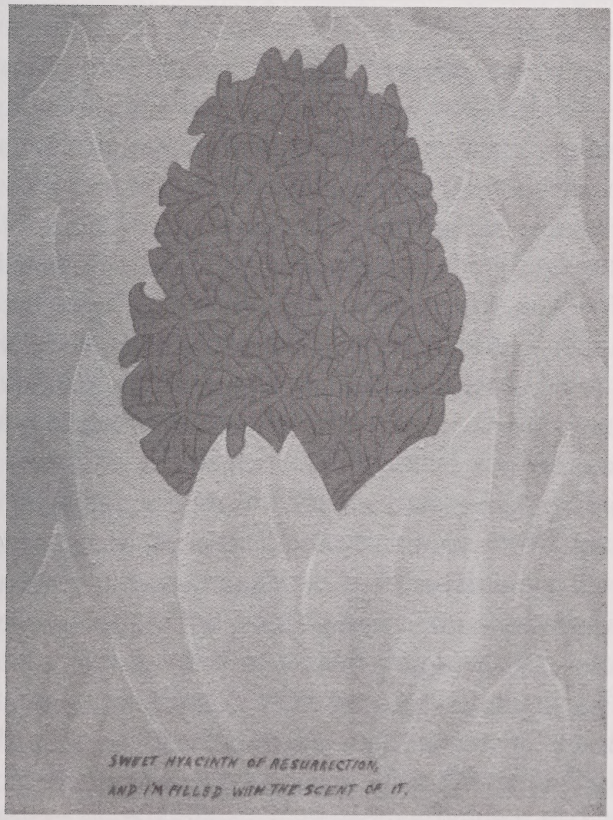
Fruition

Diana LaSpada

Torches in a temple burning
swell in ardor's raw contrition,
prosper in lowly exultation,
celebrate a eucharist.

Like Apollo's fecund noon,
these fertile fires spark parturition,
sweet hyacinth of resurrection
and I'm filled with the scent of it.

John 12:3



Acrylic painting by Diana LaSpada

Nona and the Moon

Gabrielle M. Thompson

My mother left on my second birthday. She gave me to my Nona, my grandmother, "with a pitifully small cardboard box of clothes and half a bag of disposable diapers," according to Nona's often-told story. Nona said Mama took so many drugs, it's amazing I made it through those first two years. My mother had not been married to my father, but lived with him for three years. He had abandoned us on my first birthday. I've never been much on celebrating birthdays.

Life with Nona wasn't ever easy, but we loved each other, and survived. Our old trailer leaked the cold all winter and was a tinderbox in the summer. Nona worked at a kid's camp, slinging hash through the summers, and I went along and helped wherever I could—two for the price of one. In the winter we made do with what we could preserve and dry from the vegetable garden they let us grow at the camp. Like I said, it wasn't easy, but we managed. At least until the last few years.

Grandmother was adept at wildcrafting and could locate any herb in our mountains to cure whatever ailed us—I'd never had so much as a baby aspirin pass my lips. In fall, we'd take our old burgundy Plymouth up to the Grandfather, the oldest mountain on this continent, and search the crags for the plants that would see our health through another year.

I asked her once why we lived here, in the foothills below Grandfather Mountain, instead of on the reservation, since she was half-Cherokee. She said she'd left there as a child after her uncle abused her, and she was never going back. Even when the casino was built and they started handing out money to everyone, I couldn't convince her to return. "A person's got to stand on their own two feet, make their way," she would say. My father sent a Christmas card when I was twelve, but never offered a penny for my care. Nona wouldn't ask. We figured Mama was dead.

Nona said she'd never leave the Grandfather. In early spring and fall, he was shrouded from our view in mist, but in the summer and winter he towered over us, his hard gray profile carved with gorges deep, much like the tracks separating my grandmother's cheeks and mouth. In many ways she seemed as ancient as the mountain she loved.

I loved the mountain, too. Especially in winter, when it stood silhouette against the gold lamÈ of sunset, the deciduous trees skeletal as they climbed its cliffs. When the full moon rose over the cragged edge, Grandmother would say it was a reflection of my round Cherokee face. My

hair, thick and straight to my waist, mirrored the surrounding night. "You'll take your strength from that moon, girl. Say your prayers to that moon. It watches over you like the Grandfather watches over me."

One certainty I grew up with was that Nona would never take up liquor—she had always told me that she couldn't handle even a bit of booze or drugs. But, she started drinking when we got the letter. Mama wanted to see us; she and her new beau were coming for a visit. She was an artist now and lived in Oregon, painting pictures of the fern-filled forests, which she sold to tourists. Grandmother said, "Maybe you were right. Maybe we should have moved back to the reservation instead of staying where Doris could find us."

I wrote her and told her not to come. I didn't want her. I didn't want to see her. She'd waited thirteen years to let us know she was alive; well, we just didn't care anymore. We'd buried her, in our hearts, long ago.

I got a work permit that summer, and the camp had to start paying me for my time. Just as well. Grandmother's morning headaches made her pretty much useless. By afternoon, though, she would come around enough to be able to help in the garden, only to fall to the bottom of the bottle with the encroaching darkness. I tried dumping the wine down the sink, but she'd just climb into the old Plymouth and go buy more. We didn't have enough to spare for what she managed to drink—so there was no point in pouring it down the drain. We fought, too. Nona had never been a yeller, but in the depression of drink she would scream about how everyone took advantage of her all her life—me included. It was payback time. I could support her, now that I was able.

When school started in the fall, I had trouble keeping up. I studied in my room, as much as I could, but Nona invited "friends" over who brought beer and leered at me when I'd venture into the front room to turn down the radio or the television. She would yell at me, tell me to fix something for dinner and go back to my room. The drunken bickering beyond my closed door would last long into the night. More than once, the blue flash of the law brought me out of a semi-sleep as neighbors fought back against the revelry or screaming fights. The only time Nona ever got violent with one of her buddies was when an old coot grabbed my ass as I passed through the room, cheese sandwich in hand. She chased him out the door with a fry pan aiming for his head, smacking his shoulder. That was the best laugh we'd had in months. My studies weren't going well, but band was my joy. Marching across the football field, playing the clarinet, I was somebody. I never had enough of anything to be noticed at school—a poor kid is often invisible, which beats being picked on. I didn't mind being solitary; it was

my nature. A trombone player took to tripping me, easy to do as uncoordinated as I'd always been. Jimmy was eighteen, and a junior. He was born wearing a baseball cap, puffy through the middle, and had a truck with a gun rack in the back window. He'd flipped it coming down high school hill the first week of school, and had to be airlifted to Johnson City for concussion—seatbelts were not his style and he'd been thrown out of the cab. He invited me to Wendy's after homecoming. The dented-but-running truck was filled with discarded wrappers of past burgers and fries, and crusted-over shake cups. I didn't know which smelled worse, it or his breath when he kissed me, chaw lodged under his lip.

Doris showed up on Christmas, having come across country by "the dog bus." She said that's about all that rode it, anymore. "I wanted to drive out, but Regie said his car wouldn't make it across country and back. That's probably true, but I think it was his excuse not to have to come along. But I had to see you—oh, I've missed you so much!" She brought lots of photographs and a few paintings, showing us the fertile green of her place. Rained a lot, she said. Nona acted like Mama had never been gone. Friendly as can be. I wanted to stay mad, but Doris had a way of getting around you, making you smile even when you tried your hardest not to. Grandma didn't drink as much, and we went sightseeing, Doris footing the bill. I'd never been in the paying part of Grandfather Mountain, and Nona insisted we all go up to the top on New Year's Day. We bundled up and were on the Mile High Swinging Bridge at 10:00 AM, freezing to death even though we'd dressed for the cold. It was 17 degrees and the wind chill brought that down to 6 degrees. The winter sun shone with a brilliant glare and the sky was that special blue that makes you feel like life is worth living, so the cold was tolerable. Once we crossed the bridge to the massive boulder on the other side, Nona said a prayer to Tanawha, or Great Hawk, the Cherokee name for the Grandfather. We raced back down to our old car, the only one in the parking lot. The wind shook the Plymouth and seeped through the cracks around the doors. Nona made us be still and listen. At first, we thought it was the wind's moaning she wanted us to hear—then we caught the low, sonorous bell-tone that emitted like a clarion call from deep within the ancient stone. Doris asked if the sound was the bridge vibrating in the wind, but Grandmother smiled, and started the engine. "The Grandfather," she said, "is 65 million years old. He has his hidden secrets, and powers, which he shares with those who invoke his name." At the Nature Museum, we watched the movies about Mildred the Bear and the history of the mountain, followed by lunch at the restaurant. In the animal compound the bears were hibernating, of course, but the cougars curled together below the overhang

in their compound, licking one another. The deep rumble of their growl-purr floated softly on the breeze. We drove from there down to Charlotte, where we spent the night in a motel, another first for me. Doris and Nona went to the Comedy Club, and I was happy to stay in the room and have the television remote to myself with all those channels—we could only pick up two fuzzy ones at home.

Doris agreed with Nona that Jimmy was a pitiful excuse for a boyfriend. He came over a couple of times, but his slovenly appearance and sullen responses were all they could talk about after he'd leave. That, and the fact he always had to be touching me—putting his arm around my shoulder, pulling me onto his lap, pushing my hair out of my face, stuff like that. I had to hear every kind of lecture on sex, even though I told them we weren't doing the big nasty. To be truthful, I didn't much like kissing him. But he was the first person to ever pay me any attention, and I did like that.

Doris had to spoil it all before she left, begging me to go back with her, give Oregon a try. "Suit yourself," Nona said. I told her I wasn't leaving. When the drinking got so bad afterward, I wondered if I'd made the wrong choice. But it was payback time. I couldn't leave her.

I was sixteen on Valentine's Day. Jimmy gave me a thin band of silver and asked me to marry him. I wanted to be engaged—just kinda wished it was somebody else. I wasn't sure if he really wanted to get married—we didn't have any place to live as man and wife and he bagged groceries after school at the Food Lion—or if he was just tired of playing with my titties and wanted to move onto the real thing. I took the ring as a birthday present and told him I'd think about the other.

Nona decided it for me. On the first of March we had an ice storm. I'd gone to bed, leaving her to her bottle and remorse. Sadness and tears were her accompaniment when she was drinking alone. She'd finished the bottle and must have decided to go for another. I woke to the blue flash, this time in silence. The Plymouth had skidded out of control at the bottom of our hill and, not wearing her seatbelt, Nona had gone through the windshield.

Doris didn't make the funeral, but offered me a bus ticket west. Jimmy came to console me and never left. He throws food wrappers and his dirty underwear on my floor. Easier to pick up than empty bottles.

I watch the full moon caress the Grandfather, and my lethargy tells me I'll stay. The trailer and this little spit of land are all I have left of Nona—that and her stories. I scattered her ashes from the highest peak of Tanawha. Now it is her face, not mine, I see in the rising moon. I imagine the camp will hire me back for the summer. Jimmy says he loves me. I'll survive.

Drawing by Judy Borum

Georgia's Quilt

Jennifer Browning

She collected the scraps for years.
The green was from Daddy's overcoat.
He'd worn it in the War.
He'd had it on the day he marched away from her.
They mailed it back.
He had been so proud of that damn coat.
Said it would help him on the front.
Help him come home.
His body was in France.
His coat came home.

The white of a gown beds beside the green.
Wedding and death always together sewn
with the bitter threads of a widow's hand.
The veil, the pearls, all gone into a trunk to be looked at
when melancholy strikes.
But the gown of satin marries the emerald of wool.
Ever their fates betwined.

And, now the blue taken from a baby's crib.
The son now grown with babies of his own.
A man with a father's face— the kind
eyes, strong nose and hair the shade of gold gone pale.
Husband, friend, son and father all combined.
No one else around—only the one.

Her hands grow tired in their stitch.
The thread leaks out over the satin, wool and cotton.
Piece by piece
The quilt tells her story.
Once maiden, once wife, once widow, now
old.

The Buttons

Celia H. Miles

Holly twisted the thread connecting the purple button on her blazer cuff and kept twisting it, concentrating on its double thickness, determined to conquer, to separate the button from its indented space. She knew that the woman sitting opposite had been watching for some time, maybe willing the button to resist. As the thread broke, Holly had the urge to push the purple button up her own nose, to astonish the woman, to cause some small degree of consternation in the room. She stared at the button, balancing it on an upturned forefinger, tempted to bring it to her nostril.

"Mrs. Noland, please." The nurse waited for Holly to precede her into Dr. Wesson's office. Holly looked at the button and then pushed it into the fake soil of the fake plant on the table beside the green vinyl sofa. Holly winked at the woman whose mouth was now a little *o* and followed the nurse.

"No luck this time, Mrs. Noland." The doctor snapped something shut with a click. "Don't give up hope yet." He washed his hands. "I'm referring you to a colleague in Baltimore. Dr. Dannois has a reputation for cracking tough cases." He handed a slip of paper to the nurse. "The office will set up the appointment." One more woman trying to get pregnant. In this case, one more defeat for him.

Dr. Dannois' office was small, decorated in pastels: pink and blue and yellow. The flowers were real, the sofa a soft floral fabric. Holly waited with one other patient, a girl, surely too young to be here. Holly's suit had brass buttons imprinted with lions. She started working on the lowest button on the jacket, the most accessible. She waited two hours in Dr. Dannois' office and the button perversely took forever. She twisted methodically minute after minute until the girl could not ignore the activity but could not acknowledge it either. She inspected the prints of hovering sea gulls, leaving Holly to concentrate furiously. The thread broke after a final brutal twist and the button rolled down Holly's thigh and under the nearby table. Holly looked with satisfaction at its space and got down on her knees to seek the button. She wiped wisps of dust lint from it as if brushing straw from a boy's curls. Approaching the plant, she poked her finger into the soft dirt, shoving the button close to the roots of the tulip. The nurse announced: "Mrs. Noland, this way please." The girl turned and Holly lifted her eyebrows elaborately, as if they'd shared a joke.

"I want you to see Dr. Meizel, as soon as he can set up an appointment." Dr. Dannois semi-slumped into a chair opposite Holly. "He's the best. I think you'll like him." Holly breathed deeply and stood. When she extended her hand, Dr. Dannois almost missed the gesture, turning as she was to make a final notation on the chart. "Ah, yes," she murmured. "And let me know, will you?"

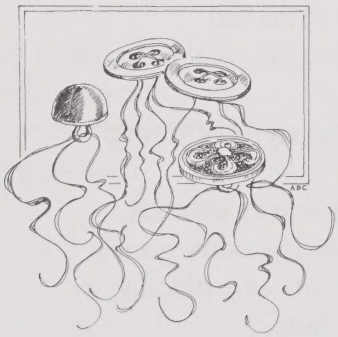
In the waiting room, Holly worried first one fine white button, then another from the double-buttoned cuff of her white blouse. As she twisted and pulled, she noticed the tiny freckles adorning the top of her hand but she did not allow them to distract her. Her intense concentration drew attention. One woman stopped reading *Parents* and simply stared, her lips slightly pursed. Another slopped a splash of coffee at the urn. Holly spent more than twenty minutes on the first button, seventeen on the next. The *Parents* reader clocked the second and breathed audibly when the button lay in Holly's hand, cupped with the other one. When the nurse appeared, Holly stood straight and smiled. She took the buttons over to the large Ficus tree in the corner and, while the nurse held the door open, Holly carefully planted the buttons fairly close to each other. Brushing her soiled hands on her blue linen skirt, she wrinkled her nose and went into Dr. Meizel's office.

"What's this thing?" Dr. Wesson's receptionist, dusting the office plants, thought she saw a purple blossom among what she knew were fake flowers.

"What in the world?" Dr. Dannois' nurse examined the strangely golden, brassy looking tulip bloom.

"Strange," Dr. Meizel's patient said. Two little white flowers seemed out of place under the Ficus tree.

And miles away, Holly slept with her newborns cradled close.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

A Past and Present Moment

Dara Llewellyn

Warning others of the poisonous coral,
how touching it
is to die,
I sink into dark depths,
needing no mask.

With sure and certain strokes,
I know the streaming way
to the brightly lit house
below the swollen sea.

Illumination spilling from the windows,
gleaming in the shadowy deep,
the house sits pristine, eternal,
waiting for my presence—below.

I glide in through a portal,
the gleaming floor lying before me.
Barren now of furniture,
each room remains intact.

I wonder at the emptiness
so richly filled before, with
presences that murmured, far
from a familiar shore.

Then, in a hidden recess,
I chance upon a curtain rod
and, nearby, two folded, silken drapes.

Should I hang these signs of living?

But what if my ancestors awaken,
those long and those recently gone?
What if I startle them—by placing
some new thing where
nothing had been before?

No, the house must remain empty.

Admitting the echoes have fled,
I turn for one last look at this dear space,
storing memories for time yet ahead.

And there, just for a moment—slipping into the room,
a figure in a dark gleaming wet suit
swims surely through the shadowy gloom,
pauses, then swims out the portal.

I wander where the figure had been swimming
but the room is unchanged from before.
Then, through a window,
I see outward—
to drifting, green, willowy forms.

I, too, move out through the portal,
tracing the sides of my sea home.
I swim round each corner slowly,
stroking through long fronds over sea stones.

The house shows small signs of decay:
moldy smears mar the sparkling white;
crumbling stones now litter the sea floor—
showing evidence of loss and blight.

I swim outward now, looking back at my shelter
already diminishing in light and in form.
I know I am leaving all its comforts—
its sighs, its smells, and its warmth.

I turn and stroke up to the heavens,
moving through dark time and space.
I wake to a new cloudy morning and
to water now falling as rain.

St. Francis and the Playboy Bunny

Randee Goodstadt

A charming Tudor house
near my neighborhood
Is graced with a nice St. Francis in its garden.

It's me who is knocked off balance by
The Playboy Bunny in their car,
hanging from the rearview mirror.

Don't they know not to mix metaphors,
That perfect saints of compassion rarely associate
With nubile, naked women?
(At least not the ones who haven't repented.)

May 14, 2001: Martin Luther King Boulevard

Randee Goodstadt

Pizza for breakfast.
Those birdies don't mind,
Feasting on remnants
Someone left behind.

Then a little ways further
Fresh rabbit for crow.
Our fine feathered friends
Get their breakfast "to go."

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Shell-Shocked

Chris Smart

The night was black with no hint of light. It was as if a huge, dark hole had swallowed the world. The air was still and crisp, the silence unnerving. I could hear the pounding of my heart in a rhythmic tribal drum beat. The squad was making its way toward the objective when it happened. Suddenly, flares lit the sky like a grand Fourth of July celebration. With the sky glowing like high noon, the squad hit the ground and started crawling toward the objective. The white hot flares soon burned out and the darkness returned. Having lost any night vision I had prior to the flares, the dark thickened ten-fold. I had no sense of the position of the rest of the squad. I lay still for a moment hoping to hear sounds of soldiers crawling through the brush. In the next instant a concussion shook the ground beneath me and the blast that followed was deafening. With that single blast, chaos erupted. Machine gun tracer fire lit up the thick darkness like fire flies being shot from cannons. The concussions continued to pop one after another like we were in a giant popcorn popper. I crawled feverishly trying to stay clear of the blasts. Every breath burned like a hot poker in my chest as I sucked icy air into my lungs. With the machine gun fire overhead and the concussions blasting from every direction, I crawled from the brush into sand. The loosely packed sand made movement incredibly difficult, and my pace slowed. I felt my lungs would burst at any moment like an over-filled helium balloon. From the light of the tracer fire, I could see a structure not far away. I crawled through the sand, under barbed wire and into depressions until I made it to the small building. Several camo-covered individuals with night vision goggles peered out. They told me to move on to a staging area several hundred meters away. I ran as if my life depended on how fast I got to the shelter. I arrived at the large, green tent barely visible through camouflage netting and entered. Members of the squad who had made it through the course before me sat solitarily around the tent. No one spoke a word. Their faces looked hollow. Even though it was only an exercise, the reality was all too real.

In the years since and in light of recent events, I've pondered this experience. Realizing the depth of my fear and anxiety, I can't fathom the thoughts of the men and women who have experienced combat for real. Please take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices made for our freedom.

Joshua Bienko

Untitled

Let the dew of grass seep into my mind's soil. Let the words bleed from my hand as if my veins were filled with ink that does not run out. Let smoke enter and toggle my blood and oxygen. Let the pattern of my fingerprint drive me insane and the detail of rain do the same. Let the wisdom of animals humble me. Let the annoyance of smiling make my face patient. Let colors absorb themselves into my eyes and senses. Let them confuse themselves in my memory and become schizophrenic so their qualities and shapes melt into one indefinable entity. Let anger overcome me in my sleep.... Let history make itself clear and then change. Let the poets passed be resurrected through my hand and allow their lives and their loves be my paper so that my ink impregnates them and their children can watch my audience ignore and walk by. Let the vibration of silence become deafening.

Dry wood is at the door cracking away at the visitor. Mud will grab hold of your feet and not let go. Let eyelashes fall out and be recognized for their fragility and power. Turn oxygen into paint so it is what I live and breathe. Let mistakes take over our literature and misspelled words fill our dictionaries and become our new vocabulary. Let graves become comfortable. Let birds speak and Hell close. Let our hands move as quickly as our minds and typewriters become weapons.

Photo by Annie Clingenpeel

Welcome to Graceland

Laura Reis Mayer

I never thought it would happen to me. My friends with children told me, some with actual tears in their eyes, that becoming a mother would change my life in ways I'd never imagined. I nodded and smiled, gave them that expected pregnant-but-serene smile of a woman who had waited her entire life for motherhood, yet secretly, I was afraid I was missing that gene that endows us with maternal instinct.

My pregnant friends spoke of "bonding" with their babies in utero, and questioned whether I could do the same when I refused to find out our baby's sex. I wondered how parents bonded in the old days, prior to ultrasounds and genetic engineering, but I said nothing and again wondered if I was doing something wrong, if I was supposed to be feeling something I wasn't. Don't get me wrong—I was fiercely protective of my baby while pregnant. Nothing made me madder than careless drivers or cigarette smokers. But as much as I was looking forward to meeting the baby that my husband and I had prayed for, I didn't feel "maternal," and I sure didn't feel "bonded."

And then Gracie entered my life. The most beautiful baby I had ever seen, she was a six-pound, fourteen-ounce bundle of personality, complete with a full head of dark, spiral curls. Later, my mother, who had been standing out in the hall during the last moments of delivery, said she heard me repeating over and over again the doctor's words: "It's a girl!" I don't remember that, but it goes to show how joyful waiting can be. So much for the accusations of the "don't you want to bond"ers.

Falling in love with Gracie has been a progressive process. Oh, no doubt, my husband and I were smitten on her birthday. But with each new milestone and each new smile, we feel another tug at those proverbial heartstrings. Not only do I find myself becoming the woman I swore I'd never become; I am also becoming the woman I never thought I *could* become—a real mommy. Instead of chatting with coworkers about the latest books, movies, or restaurants my husband and I have experienced, I share stories of bottle battles and compare numbers of teeth, words, and poops per day. I kiss her so often it's become an addiction and I can't wait to sniff her sweet curls each night after we bathe her in lavender bubbles. I regale her with nursery rhymes I had no idea I had tucked in the recesses of my memory. I complain about my loss of sleep, shape, and sex, but I drop whatever I'm doing to use my mommy magic and transform a crying baby back to my sweet Princess Grace.

I never thought it would happen to me, but oh, how it has. I am in love with a baby named Grace, and my friends were right—life will never be the same. I wouldn't want it any other way.

Painting by Bonnie Temple Cassara

8 a.m. on the Tarmac

Kenet Adamson

The dumpy scowl sits.
Tweed jacket gathered and bunched
by the seat belt.
It wants a single-malt scotch.
Double.
Straight up.

The uniform says no.

Lighting a pipe,
it fumes
and smokes.

Put it out.

We sit in a
traffic jam.
Six more planes ahead of us.
It scrunches down and
crushes the paperback's binding.

Two more hours in flight.
Viva Las Vegas.

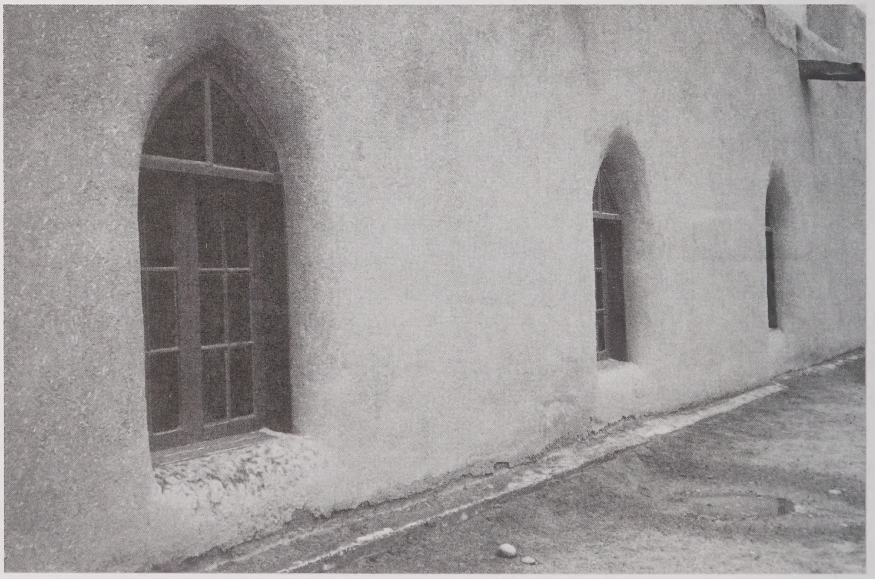


Photo by Annie Clingenpeel

Show Time

Joanne S. Johnston

It's just August, but along the roadsides
sumacs, dogwoods, and sourwoods
give up the green for the red
Hinting at a production about to begin.

In a special place, petite maples
unable to wait to get on stage
scream with their orange attire
While close by, their elders sport mere splotches
of color around their edges.

In the distance, amid a sea of green
only a suggestion of red and yellow appear,
But you know it's coming!

Nature's annual production
painted with broad brushes
will herald a time of beauty
as the season
takes its final bow
to make way for Winter.

Photo by Joanne Johnston

Oh, Holy Night

Nelda Holder

I am sitting on the rough, scratchy wool rug in front of the fireplace, feeling its heat, enveloped by the noisy joy of a large and affectionate family. My cousins are around me on the floor; aunts and uncles are on sofas, chairs, piano benches, or milling about between the living room and kitchen, while Grandmother is still in the kitchen putting up dishes and food. We are all full of turkey, boiled custard, and fresh coconut cake.

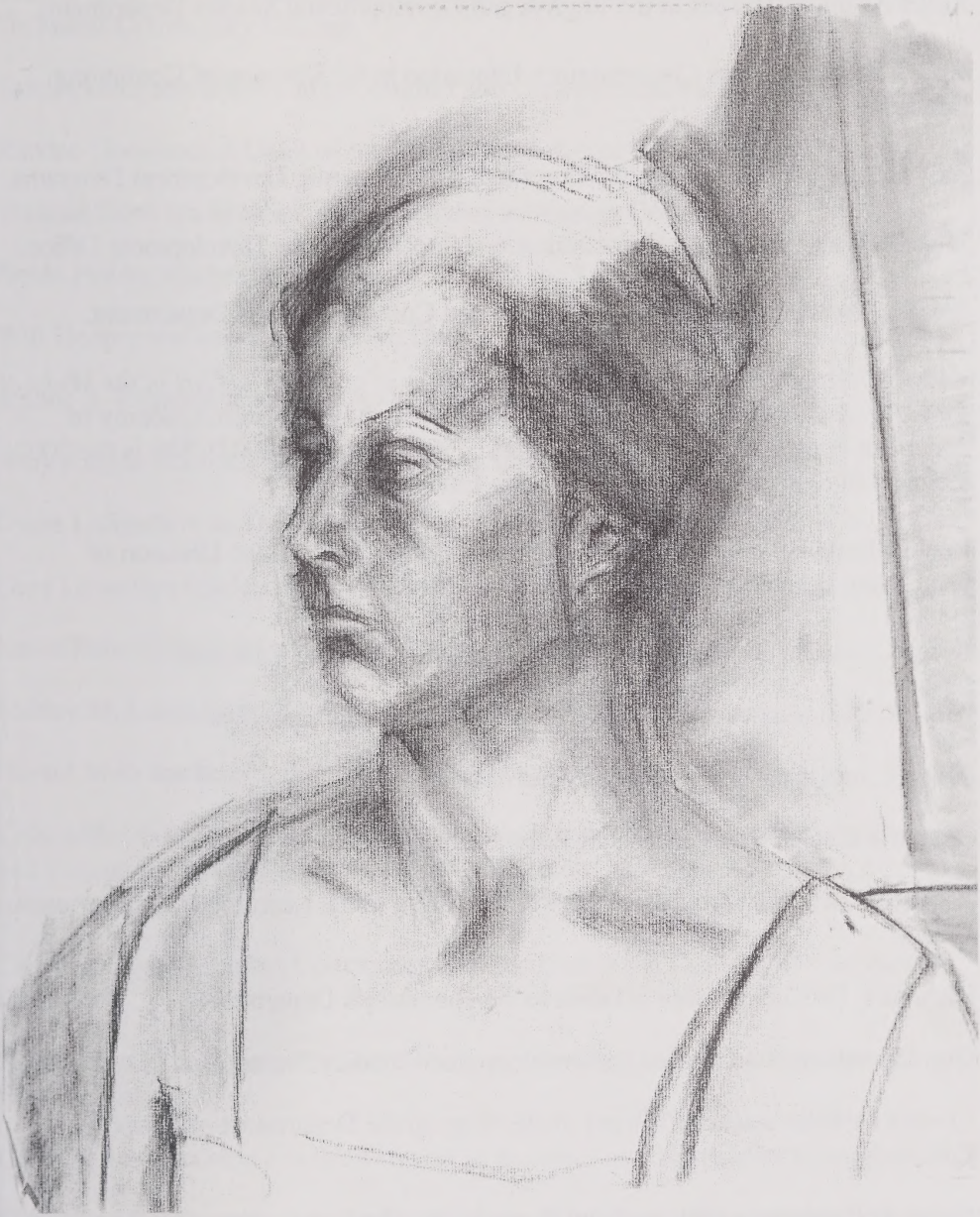
Granddaddy is on his throne, the green stuffed chair, smiling beneficently at his subjects. His contentment suffuses the room, enhancing the laughter and embellishing the glow of the tree. I feel nothing could make him happier than this gathering, this holiday, this family.

The gifts are piled haphazardly under the chosen-from-the-land pine, shaken and tossed back by a dozen pairs of cousin hands. We must wait until they are through in the kitchen. Then we must wait as the gifts are disbursed one by one, opened individually before our rapt attention—which vies for prominence with our childish impatience. Each box then goes around the full circle for closer scrutiny.

We children will toss wrappings wildly at our turn, then wad them up and throw them into the flames, moving back as the fire throws its heat farther into the room. Then we will "slip" out, light our candles, and sing at the north window. This is our gift to them, penniless as we are. We know they will love it, will "oooh" and "aaah" over the loveliness of our young voices.

I look at my grandfather's white head and kind face. I hear the voices, all talking at once and all distinguished/distinguishable. Uncle Frank's playful urgency. Aunt Clarice's rapid inquiry. My daddy's basso. My Aunt Hazel's titter. Steve is gossiping. Rebecca is complaining. Carol is talking quietly.

I am sitting in the middle of a pool of love, knowing I can turn in any direction with the same buoyancy.



Drawing by Joan Worth

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Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

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